CASTE

CONSIDERED UNDER

ITS MORAL, SOCIAL, AND RELIGIOUS ASPECTS.

THE LE BAS PRIZE ESSAY IN THE UNIVERSITY
OF CAMBRIDGE FOR THE YEAR 1860.

BY

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Συγχεῖ πάνθ' ὁ παγκρατὴς χρόνος.

SOPHOCLES.

ADVERTISEMENT.

A LARGE number of Members of the Civil Service of India who were students at the East India College at Haileybury at various intervals during the thirty years that the Rev. C. W. LE BAS, M.A., formerly Fellow of Trinity College, was connected with that Institution, desirous of testifying their regard for Mr. LE BAS, and of perpetuating the memory of his services, raised a Fund which they offered to the University of Cambridge for founding an annual Prize, to be called, in honour of Mr. LE BAS, The *Le Bas Prize*, for the best English Essay on a subject of General Literature, such subject to be occasionally chosen with reference to the history, institutions, and probable destinies and prospects of the Anglo-Indian Empire.

The Prize is subject to the following Regulations, confirmed by Grace of the Senate, Nov. 22, 1848 :—

1. That the LE BAS Prize shall consist of the annual interest of the above-mentioned Fund, the

Essay being published at the expense of the successful Candidate.

2. That the Candidates for the Prize shall be, at the time when the subject is given out, Bachelors of Arts under the standing of M.A.; or Students in Civil Law or Medicine of not less than four or more than seven years' standing, not being graduates in either faculty, but having kept the exercises necessary for the degree of Bachelor of Law or Medicine.

"3. That the subject for the Essay shall be selected, and the Prize adjudicated, by the Vice-Chancellor, and two other members of the Senate, to be nominated by the Vice-Chancellor, and approved by the Senate, at the first Congregation after the tenth day of October in each year.

"4. That the subject shall be given out in the week preceding the division of the Michaelmas Term in each year, and the Essays sent in before the end of the next ensuing Easter Term."

The subject for the Essay for 1860 was—

Caste considered under its Moral, Social, and Religious Aspects.

PREFACE.

THE singular institution of Indian *castes* has ever, from the time of the Greek historians and geographers to the present day, attracted the attention of all who have written upon the subject of India. It is something so exclusively Indian that they could not do otherwise. The institution was so alien, in form at least, to European ideas; it prevailed over so vast a portion of the globe, and had existed from so ancient a date; that forced as they were to study it in detail, the first accounts transmitted to Europe could not but be imperfect. Even after India had come into the possession of an European nation, and had been traversed in every direction by Europeans, the

theories and judgments formed of its character, of its merits and demerits, of its past effects and future destiny, were obscure and contradictory. This must be partly attributed to hasty generalization and a want of patient observation and collection of undoubted facts. They were often too apt to forget that the institution prevailed over a territory two-thirds the size of Europe, in countries as dissimilar in language, race, manners, and religion, as Portugal and Sweden, among populations as unequal in civilization as the citizens of Paris and the peasantry of Poland; and that of this vast territory they were acquainted with but a small portion, which they could only observe during the scanty leisure of an active life. Their errors are to be further explained by the imperfect knowledge which the most learned in Europe had of Indian history. That history is still obscure and scanty. Only a small portion of Indian literature is open to any but Oriental scholars; nor is the whole accessible even to them. Still year by year is the veil gradually removed from the face of this

historic Isis. The history of Indian institutions becomes every day fuller and clearer.

Among these institutions Caste presents peculiar difficulties. The questions, to which it gives rise, are at once theoretical and practical. An idea current in the minds of more than a hundred millions of human beings, it cannot be strictly said to be purely religious, social, or political, yet it is complicated with ideas of religion, politics, and social distinctions. Traditional prejudices affect the minds both of Europeans and of Hindus in its discussion. Add to this an ambiguity of character that might well puzzle the first observers. It means sometimes so little, sometimes so much. It represents distinctions that are reasonable and apparent, and others that are purely factitious. It separates porters that bear burdens on their heads from palankeen-bearers that bear them on their shoulders; it separates the member of a civilized community from a savage. The popular Hindu mind conceives Caste to be an inseparable attribute of humanity. The ideal outcaste may be considered

as one who belongs to a caste of which he is the only member. Not that such beings actually exist in India any more than in any other part of the world. The Parsees are considered as a caste, so are the Jews; and, from observing the habits of their European masters, natives have come to the conclusion that even among themselves the *Sahib logue* are not ignorant of the distinctions of caste.

As this institution was peculiar to India, Europeans, struck with its strangeness, found or thought that they had found therein the source of other points of difference between Indian civilization and that in which they had themselves been reared. In so doing, they attributed to it an importance greater than it really possessed. In the following essay many of these supposed results of caste will be shown to prevail in other countries ignorant of that institution, but in some other respects circumstanced similarly to India.

In treating the subject of this essay, I have thought it best to give a sketch of the history

of its first origin and subsequent changes before describing its present state and discussing its effects and character. To form a just judgment of the merits of any institution demands a consideration of its influence in past times as well as at the present day. The important and intricate question of the relations of caste to Christianity are discussed in a separate chapter.

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CHAPTER I.

THE HISTORY OF CASTE.

THE first picture we have of the Indo-Aryans is drawn by the authors and compilers of that collection of ancient sacrificial hymns, called the Rig Veda. It is a picture fragmentary and imperfect, yet at the same time most precious, painted, as it is, by contemporaries, and unlike formal histories, without any thought of an effect to be produced on the judgment of posterity. There they appear as a simple heroic people advancing from the banks of the Indus, and "the land of the seven rivers," to the conquest

of the rich plains of Hindostan. Their polity and social condition seem to have resembled those of the Homeric Greeks. The people are led by their prophets, priests, and kings, but as yet all are conscious of a common brotherhood. The names of the four Hindu castes have not as yet acquired their technical significations. The word *Brahmin* is but the designation of one out of seven kinds of priests officiating in the public sacrifices offered on behalf of the commonwealth by its chiefs. *Kshattriya* occurs once, to denote the immediate dependant of a king. *Vaisya* appears only in the rudimentary form, *Vis*, and is then applied to the people at large without distinction of rank or condition.* The name of the fourth class is never found in the Rig Veda, but slaves are mentioned under the name of Dasas. It is not before the fourth, or Atharoa Veda, that we find *Sudras* alluded to, and then as hostile. In the epic poem of the

* See Professor Wilson's prefaces to his translation of the *Rig Veda*, especially that in vol. iii. Also Muir's *Sanskrit Texts*, part i. pp. 150, 151.

Mahabharata, which is probably of still later date, they are mentioned as an indigenous or non-Aryan tribe.* At this period we hear nothing of hereditary and irrevocable occupations, no degradation or exaltation, no prohibitions against intermarriage or social intercourse. In fact, there is but one great and marked division of mankind, and that into two classes. On the one side are the Aryas, on the other the Dasyus; on the one side the fair-complexioned friends of Indra, who worship "the bright gods," with rites acceptable to them, and on the other side the dark-skinned demon-worshippers, who do not. The consciousness of one common national origin, of peculiar national characteristics is still strong and clear in their breasts. Thus this division of mankind is national. The Aryas are opposed to the Dasyus, as Jews to Gentiles, as Iran to Turan, as Greeks to barbarians.

These were the days of conquest, but by steps, the details of which have not been preserved for us, the fair-skinned intruders from the north-

* *Christianity and Hinduism*, pp. 278, 279.

west have established themselves in the country between the Himmalaya and Vindhya mountains, now called Hindostan, but by them Arya-verta, or the land inhabited by the respectable—by the men of pure blood. The conquest has not been one of extermination, but of assimilation. The Aborigines may now be divided into two great classes. The first is that of the *Sudras*, of those who have submitted to the fair-complexioned worshippers of Indra, and whom we shall hereafter find described by the Brahminical author of the *Bhagavata Purana* as "the Black Caste." * These Sudras stand, so to say, in the porches of the temples of the Aryan gods, as servants, not as children and friends. They may be considered as the *plebs* in every Aryan community as distinguished from the *populus* of the "twice-born," their conquerors,—if these words, having reference among the ancient Romans to political and civil distinctions, may be applied to corresponding religious ones among the ancient Hindus. The plebeian origin of the Sudras is marked by

* Quoted by Mr. Muir in his *Sanskrit Texts*, part i. p. 12.

their exclusion from investiture with the sacred cord which was the distinguishing badge of the twice-born Aryans. All the Aborigines are, however, not thus incorporated into the commonwealths of their conquerors. There yet remain unsubdued, through all the revolutions of India, many detached tribes of the Aborigines, occupying the more rugged and inaccessible portions of the country. Some of them, as, for instance, the Gonds, of Gondwana, are spread over a large extent of territory. They are known by various names, as Bhils, Santals, Khonds, Gonds, Kulis, &c. &c., and are affected in very different degrees by the religion, social habits, and civilization of the Hindus of the lowlands. These two classes of the Aborigines may be compared to the tame Indians and the wild Indians in Spanish America. The first are converted, at least nominally, to the religion of their European conquerors; they cultivate the ground, and inhabit regular villages and towns, and form the lower classes even in the great cities, such as Mexico and Lima. The others preserve their freedom on the condition

of renouncing all participation in the advantages of the white man's civilization, maintaining a predatory warfare against the invaders, and all who have submitted to them. One cannot help remarking, as an additional, though perhaps unimportant point in the parallel, that in both instances the invaders belong to the fair complexioned Caucasian, the invaded to the swarthier Mongolian race.

The tide of Aryan conquest is now slackened by their possession of such fertile and ample dominions, as the current of a river flows less rapidly when it has freed itself from the straitening gorges of the mountains, and wanders amid a level loamy plain. The fertile soil of Hindostan, occupied by an ingenious people possessed of a considerable amount of civilization, afforded both wealth and leisure to the communities which this conquest established on its plains. This wealth, this leisure, their climate disposed them to enjoy. The great mass of the conquerors were urged to no further enterprises by the hope of any richer reward. Those petitions for temporal

blessings which their forefathers had addressed to the bright gods, while as yet between the waters of the Drishadwati and the Suraswati, had in Arya-verta obtained their fulfilment. Those prayers, those praises had been answered by success. They were then more than orthodox, they were divine. The gods alone could have taught the means whereby the gods themselves are bent to grant men their requests. Nay, more than this, the Vedas are from everlasting.* They are not so much creatures of the gods, as beings co-ordinate with them.† They are existences, who are among the great powers of nature which rule the world. Formula, hymns, sacred texts, which a more prosaic mind might look on as merely collections of words and phrases more or less suitable to the occasions on which they were employed, are thus personified. When invested with that sacred cord, which is the

* See Dr. Max Müller's *History of Antient Sanskrit Literature*, p. 95.

† "Priests, Rishis, *gods*, *the Vedas*, the fixed stars, years, the Pitris and Sadhyas, compose the second state of goodness." Quoted from *Manu* in Muir's *Sanskrit Texts*, part i. p. 18.

symbol and badge of complete Aryanism, the newly initiated is said to be born again, and in this birth, just as his preceptor in sacred things is said to be his spiritual father, so is the Gayatri, that mystic verse used as a sacramental formula, called his spiritual mother.*

Now these eternal entities, these omnipotent words, were present upon earth solely by means of oral tradition. At what date the use of alphabets was introduced into India is not clearly ascertained, but it appears from ancient authorities (as indeed the analogies afforded by the histories of other nations might lead us to expect) that, even when known, the art of writing was but

* Menu, ii. 170. Every "twice-born man," that is, every member of the three superior classes, had to be initiated into his caste by the ceremony of *investiture*, with a triple thread called *janeo*. The thread of a Brahmin is of cotton in three strings. Those of the other classes were respectively of *sana* thread and of wool. As the second and third classes are by this time considered to be extinct, the expression "twice-born men" is equivalent to "Brahmins," who are at once recognizable by the *janeo*, which they take care to wear as conspicuously as possible. Menu fixes the time for the ceremony of investiture to be the eighth year of a Brahmin, and it must not be deferred till after his sixteenth year, on pain of forfeiture of caste. Menu, ii. 36, 37, 38, 44.

sparingly and seldom employed. The Brahmin who learns the Veda from a written copy loses all the merit of such acquirement equally with him who learns it from the mouth of a Sudra, and with him who, learning it, does so without a right comprehension of its meaning.*

The peculiar sanctity of the Vedic hymns was deemed to reside not merely in their general sense, nor merely in their sentences, nor even in the mere words. In order to secure the undiminished fulness of their divinity, it was necessary that they should be uttered with every accent of the old Vedic dialect rightly placed, and duly emphasized.†

Thus the requisite knowledge of their text could not be acquired from a written copy. To gain this requisite knowledge, and, having gained it, to hand it down to others, required men who should be found willing to give up their whole lives to

* *Antient Sanskrit Literature* by Dr. Max Müller, p. 502. Compare also p. 117 of the same work. That alphabets were invented long before their general application to literary purposes: see Bishop Russell's *Connection of Sacred and Profane History.* Book III. chap. vii. esp. pp. 452, 453, and 456.

† *Antient Sanskrit Literature* by Dr. Max Müller, p. 160.

the perpetuation of this sacred textual tradition. The whole commonwealth appears to have believed, that on such tradition being perpetuated depended their prosperity and their continuance. Those, then, who devoted themselves to this work, would be rewarded by the gratitude and veneration of all their fellow-citizens, feelings which would naturally lead to wealth and to influence. Such men were called *Brahmins*, that is, *Divines*, as having "a great inclination for the *Brahma Veda*, or the divine sciences." *

For the accomplishment of such laborious studies, each Brahmin had to submit to a long and regular course of life—first as a student, then as a teacher. Furthermore, the word was pure and holy; so, therefore, must be the earthly vessels in which such treasure was stored here below. What they uttered was the word of God. These men then were divine. The whole body of these sages constituted the mouth of God speaking to man, an idea which naturally gave rise to the mythological account of the origin of the four castes, which we

* *Jatimala*, quoted in Colebrooke's *Essays*, vol. ii. p. 178.

shall notice presently. These men have knowledge of that which can influence the divine will. They can bless, therefore; also can they curse. They must then be regarded not only with reverence, but with fear. All things exist by their sufferance. When these conclusions, logically drawn from the doctrine of the syllabic inspiration of the Veda, are displayed by writers who are themselves Brahmins, the extravagance of their expressions almost surpasses even European ideas of Oriental hyperbole. They, if "once enraged, could destroy a king with his troops, elephants, horses, cars. Who without perishing could provoke those holy ones, by whom the all-devouring fire was created, the sea with undrinkable waters, and the moon waxing and waning? What prince could gain wealth by oppressing those, who, if angry, could frame other worlds and regents of worlds, creating new gods and men? What man desirous of life would injure those rich in the knowledge of the Veda, by the aid of whom (that is, by whose oblations) worlds and gods continually subsist." *

* Menu, ix. 313, 314, 315, 316.

How enviable was a position such as these Brahmins occupied! In spite of its life-long observance of strict rules, of its youth-long course of obedience and study, it must have fascinated many: the studious, the designing, the proud, the religious, all those who piqued themselves on the purity of their race or their conduct.

Now this body of men is formed of the students of each generation learning from the mouths of the approved of the former generation. The desire for offspring was perhaps stronger among the Hindus than among any other people. All would leave behind them at their death sons who would perform the sacrifices necessary for their happiness beyond the grave. Those then who teach are almost universally husbands and fathers. We can hence easily imagine how these saint-sages became converted into a *caste*, how gradually it came to be understood that in these "schools of the prophets," the sons of prophets only would be received.* Once let this encroach-

* The first steps towards such a state of things might perhaps have developed themselves in mediæval Europe.

ment take place unresisted or resisted ineffectually, and it would be quite in accordance with all we know of the workings of the Hindu mind, that the doctrine should be invented, that prophetic descent conferred a purity indispensable for initiation into the prophetic order. Even at this point there is a wide distance to be overpassed before Brahminhood becomes a mere consequence of descent, such as we find it in the time of Menu, who says, "A Brahmin, whether learned or unlearned, is a powerful divinity, even as fire is a powerful divinity, whether consecrated or popular;" and again, "From his high birth alone a Brahmin is an object of veneration even to the gods."* But we have traced the usurpation more than halfway, and can see no great difficulty in its completion. That in the long course of ages the prophetical or Brahminical office should become

They were, however, effectually checked by the successful severity of Hildebrand, in enforcing celibacy on the clergy. Giraldus Cambrensis found the canons of St. David's quite a family party. See *The Antiquities of the Cathedral Church of St. David's* by Messrs. Jones and Freeman, pp. 273, 274.

* Menu, ix. 317; and again, xi. 85.

hereditary, appears still more probable when we consider the tendency exhibited everywhere in India to render all offices hereditary, even in cases to which such succession seems least suited. India is at this day full of hereditary prime ministers, hereditary subordinate ministers, hereditary farmers of taxes. Not only does the son of the headman of a village succeed to his father's office as a matter of right, so also does the son of the village accountant, and even the son of the village constable. Nay, in many instances all those offices follow the law of property, and are actually shared among all the sons.*

Such, then, being the gradual steps by which the first caste, that of the Brahmins, probably consolidated itself, let us see if the growth of the second admits of like elucidation. The history of a similar state of things may perhaps throw some light upon this part of our subject. An ingenious and eloquent French historian has laid it down as a rule, to which history affords no exception, that wherever strongly marked dis-

* Elphinstone's *History of India*, pp. 64, 65. 4th ed.

tinctions of ranks and classes exist in a body politic—that body politic is founded on a conquest.* Without discussing the universality of this law, we may at least affirm that the Aryan conquests in India produced this result. In his history of the Norman Conquest of England, he has shown how the successors of Alfred, from being the national chiefs of the West Saxons, came to assume the character of almost absolute sovereigns of all England. Being at the same time kings by the right of election on the southern side of the Trent, and by right of conquest on the northern, they gradually extended the prerogatives belonging to them in the latter capacity over all their subjects without distinction of race or territory.† Similar circum-

* Ouvrez l'histoire au point que vous voudrez, prenez au hasard le climat et l'époque, si vous rencontrez une peuplade d'hommes, soit éclairés, soit encore sauvages, vivant sous un régime de servitude, soyez sûr qu'en remontant plus haut vous trouverez une conquête, et que ces hommes sont des vaincus. — *Dix ans d'études historiques* par M. Augustin Thierry, partie 2. No. iv.

† *Histoire de la Conquête de l'Angleterre*, tom i. p. 89., 1851. Paris.

stances produced similar results in other places and other times. The successors of William the Conqueror strove to reduce their Norman followers, who were strictly copartners with them in the sovereignty of conquered England, to the level of the conquered English. To a certain extent they succeeded; at least with that portion whom necessity or choice made adopt those branches of industry which had been assigned to the support of the vanquished. Such a policy, pursued more or less, everywhere tended to increase the distance between the European sovereigns, and all classes of their subjects; until at last something very like a *royal caste* has been formed throughout Europe.

As before mentioned, the word *kshattriya* occurs once in the Rig Veda, and then denotes the immediate dependant of a raja. The Aryans seemed to have conquered Arya-verta piece-meal, one tribe encroaching in one direction, another in another, somewhat in the same way as that in which the Heptarchy was established in England. So far were these bands from

always acting in concert that we find hymns in the Rig Veda, soliciting the aid of Indra against Aryan enemies as well as Dasyu.* Thus there is reason to suppose that after the conquest the number of new kingdoms, and therefore of rajas might well be considerable. Every one of these rajas had his troop of *kshattriyas*, or retainers, around him. In many cases they were probably connections of his by blood, like many of the *thakoors* or feudal chiefs of modern Rajpootana. Meanwhile the mass of the conquerors betake themselves to productive labour, merely reducing the conquered to a sort of villeinage. The *Vaisyas*, that is to say, the *people*, are farmers and master-workmen, for whom the enslaved Sudras are labourers and journeymen. What was the exact relation of the Sudras to their "twice-born" conquerors is not at all clear, especially as respects the early days of Aryan settlement. We can only assert that even the so-called code of Menu,

* See the late Professor Wilson's translation of the *Rig Veda Sanhita*, vol. iii. p. xv., with the passages referred to.

which was composed after the regular caste-system had been fully organized, recognizes the personal liberty of the Sudra, giving him licence to emigrate in case of distress even beyond the bounds of Aryan dominion, whither the twice-born are forbidden to follow him.* It seems that the position of the Sudras was not so much depressed beneath the Vaisyas as the Helots were degraded below the mass of the Laconians; the Kshattriyas, the king's relations and bodyguard, standing in the place of the Spartiatæ. In this state of things there would be a continual tendency in the Vaisyas, to approach towards a resemblance to the Sudras in habits and feelings, while the Kshattriyas would at the same time be led to look down on their less fortunate fellow-subjects, although of equally pure Aryan descent, and to pique themselves upon a certain additional nobility. If at the same time the Brahmins were forming themselves into a caste, strictly so called, we can imagine that these royal soldiers would not

* Menu, ii. 24.

be inferior to the priests in exclusiveness. They thus became the caste of *Kshattriyas* or *Rajanyas.* The latter word means royal, and marked the caste to which all royal families belonged, and from which alone were new kings to be chosen. *Kshattriya,* means protector; originally, I suppose, of the king's person, but it was afterwards understood as having reference to the kingdom, to society, to the established order of things.

When all this had been effected it became an evident piece of sound policy on the part of the two superior orders to form an alliance for the conservation of that social hierarchy, in which they were both placed so high. To this mutual good understanding the author of Menu's Code alluded when he wrote, "The Kshattriya cannot prosper without the Brahmin, nor can the Brahmin be raised without the Kshattriya. Both classes, by cordial union, are exalted as well in this world as in the next." *

Having now traced caste to the point where it assumes the form in which it appears in this

* ix. 322.

so-called Menu's Code, a few words in explanation of its authority and character may not be out of place here. Its title in the original Sanskrit is *Manava-dharma-sastra*, generally translated *Menu's Code*, but its sense would be more perfectly expressed by the paraphrase, "the treatise on what is just, right, and according to good custom in things civil, religious, moral and ceremonial, according to the teaching and traditions of the disciples or descendants of Menu." That it is not a legal code in the ordinary acceptation of the words is apparent from a mere perusal of the work, which contains an account of the création of all things, several physical and metaphysical theories authoritatively announced,* and a long series of voluntary penances for the expiation of ceremonial defilements. It is chiefly taken up with a full statement of how every one ought to act, according to his caste and station in life. It follows the Brahmin in particular with an

* For instance, that both animals and vegetables have internal consciousness, and are sensible of pleasure and pain. I. 49.

extreme minuteness from his conception in his mother's womb till his last remains are deposited in the grave. Denunciations of certain specific punishments for violations of the laws occur frequently; but even in these parts its true character is sufficiently manifested. It was not a code actually enforced in any part of India, much less throughout the whole of the Hindu world. Like the Republic of Plato it is rather a picture of the condition of society, which, according to a philosopher's theories, ought to exist, than of that which at any time really existed.* It is superfluous to say that its author or authors were of the Brahminical caste, of which caste it contains all the prejudices and all the pretensions in their barest deformity. This authorship, however, makes all the more interesting those passages wherein it defines the position of the Brahmins in society, especially as regards their exclusion from political power and worldly wealth. The Brahmins here represent themselves as preserving the world by their religious

* Elphinstone's *History of India*, p. 11.

services* and the blamelessness of their lives, which is to be preserved by a complete devotion to sacred studies, and by keeping aloof from the cares and pleasures of the world. "A Brahmin should constantly shun worldly honour as he would shun poison." †

Such being the character of the work we shall look with suspicion upon statements made upon its authority by such authors as the historian Mill, who were unable to read it in connection with the rest of the remains of antient Sanskrit literature. The repeated denunciations of Sudra exaltation are rather proofs of the frequency of such inversion of caste-rank than of the universally degraded character of the great mass of the people. Mr. Buckle cites as apposite the passage which declares that, even if his master emancipate a Sudra, he does not cease to be a slave; "for from that condition, in which nature has placed him, who is there that can remove him?" ‡ But inasmuch as Sudras were not alone

* Menu, ix. 316. † Menu, ii. 162.

‡ Menu, viii. 414., quoted in Mr. Buckle's *History of Civilization*, vol. i. p. 73.

subject to be reduced to slavery, the text seems to assert that, when emancipated from his proper master, he who had just been a slave and was still by birth a Sudra, did not in putting off the first character, also elevate himself above the second. It appears that, whatever may have been the teaching of the most bigoted and unpractical Brahmins, the condition of the Sudras was preferable to that of any other ancient population reduced by a conquest to villeinage.* In ancient as in modern Indian history we frequently read of Sudras rising to the highest positions in the State, and even to royalty itself. Salivahana and Chandragupta, two of the most distinguished of Indian sovereigns, were examples of such elevation.

When Indian society had assumed this form the popular mind called at once for a myth and a rationale to say *how* it was so, and *why*. The Brahmin mythologers consequently invented many legends more or less fanciful to supply that need. One of the best received told how "that glorious

* Elphinstone's *History of India*, p. 17.

Being for the sake of preserving this universe ordained separate duties for those who sprang from his mouth, his arm, his thigh, and his foot."* Society, they argued, cannot exist without a division of offices and occupations; there must therefore be a corresponding division of mankind. If the castes neglected their proper occupations, and intruded into those of their superiors, all things would be thrown into confusion, the dog and the crow would devour the sacrifices, the gods would withdraw their favour, the commonwealth would hasten to ruin.†

Doubtless the compilers of Menu's code looked on regular fourfold caste as universal and immutable, but, like everything else of merely human origin, it contained within itself the principle of its own destruction. Of the four classes recognized as pure, two, if not three, are considered extinct, nor is the purity of the first free from suspicion. Hence arise the chief points of difference between the caste systematized in Menu, and that actually existing in India at the present day. Let us

* Menu, i. 87. † Menu, vii.

notice some of the more prominent causes of this disintegration, and the more important features of the change thus produced.

The parts, which the Brahmin and the Kshattriya had to play in the drama of life, were as different as the circumstances, to which their respective castes owed their elevation. Such differences could not but give rise to a great diversity in sentiment and feeling, a diversity which in the lapse of time could not fail to be aggravated in many ways. The Brahmin would prefer gaining his ends by influence and indirect means, and when obtained enjoying them in peace. The Kshattriya would pursue all his designs with violence, and, ever despising what he might have already gained, would enter on new enterprises, not so much for profit's sake, as to escape from the listlessness of inaction. A similar diversity of character has been remarked between the modern Brahmins and the Rajpoots, who may be regarded as the present representatives of the extinct Kshattriyas. Of the Brahmin cultivators in Oude, who hold villages entirely occupied by men of their

own caste, or of lower castes dependent upon them, Gen. Sleeman* tells us with what care they exclude all Rajpoots from becoming possessed of any share in their villages under any title whatever, and this on account of their turbulent and grasping character. Indeed his official journal reads like a practical and historical illustration of the text in the Bhagavata Purana†, which describes the Kshattriyas as "that depraved and impious race, full of passion and darkness, which burdened the earth." The same authority thus idealizes the opposite character of the Brahmins. "It is by long-suffering that we, the Brahmins, have acquired respect; the same means whereby the Deity, the instructor of all worlds, attained the highest rank of godhead." Such is the strong contrast drawn by one of the later Brahmins between the vices of the warrior and the virtues of the priest; but the author of Menu's code, writing at an earlier date, when the first two castes were allied, recognizes restless ambition as a virtue in a

* *Official Tour in Oude*, by General Sir W. H. Sleeman, vol. ii. pp. 56, 57.

† See Muir's *Sanskrit Texts*, part i. pp. 160, 161.

Kshattriya, although blameworthy in all others. We there read that "those rulers of the earth, who, desirous of defeating each other, exert their utmost strength without ever averting their faces, after death ascend straightway to heaven."* A strange blessing this to be pronounced by a recluse upon mere valour without a word respecting the justice of the quarrel!

The histories of mediæval Europe and of modern Rajpootana† suggest one ground of dispute between the royal and prophetical castes. I refer to the resumption by kings and chiefs of gifts bestowed by their predecessors upon the Brahmins. Another seems hinted at by such legends as that of the rivalry between Vasishta, born a Brahmin, and Viswamitra, of Kshattriya birth, who is said to have attained to Brahminhood by his excessive austerities.‡ Perhaps the secular princes really perceived that the prerogatives and emoluments of their priestly subjects were greater

* Menu, vii. 89.

† Tod's *Annals of Rajast'han*, vol. i. pp. 507, 510.

‡ Muir's *Sanskrit Texts*, part i. chap. iii.

than their own; or it may be merely in consequence of the fact that all the legends which have come down to us were either composed or revised by the Brahmins, that we always find the Kshattriyas represented as coveting the powers or the wealth of the Brahmins, who never appear ambitious of secular sovereignty. Whichever may be the true explanation of this fact, Hindu mythology has preserved for us indications of a fearful struggle between the royal and prophetic classes. It resulted in the total disappearance of the Kshattriyas from Indian history many centuries before the Mohammedan invasion. "Thrice seven times," says the Bhagavata Purana, in the passage above referred to, "did Parasu-Rama sweep that depraved race from the face of the earth."

To such of course, as believe in the miraculous powers of the ancient Brahminical sages, any explanation of these myths would be worse than superfluous. To more sceptical Europeans it may be interesting to consider how such a catastrophe may be supposed to have been brought about. The allies and the tools of the Brahmins must

have been the industrial classes, especially the Vaisyas. If our view of the original separation of the two higher classes from the mass of the Aryan settlers be correct, it can be easily imagined that the Vaisyas regarded with very different feelings the Kshattriyas and the Brahmins. The pretexts for the elevation of the military caste could not appear so plausible as those which might be alleged in favour of the segregation of the prophetical. The former were at once less elevated in ideal rank, and, in all probability, much further removed from the people as respects social intercourse and community of interests. Add to all this, the consideration that their position depended on their possession of material superiority, and that of the Brahmins on an influence which would oblige them to cultivate those arts which attract popular favour, it would hence appear consonant with all the teachings of history that in the event of a collision between the representatives of brute force on the one side, and the terrors of the unseen world on the other, the respectable, wealthy, but unennobled classes should

be found supporters of the latter. If men of half Kshattriya descent were sufficiently numerous, it is probable that they also, discontented with their inferior position, would furnish the Brahmins important aid in the struggle. We have furthermore reason to suppose that ere this the military aristocracy had become considerably diminished and enfeebled by contests among themselves. The epic of the Mahabharata, or the Great War, had probably some foundation in actual history. At any rate, we cannot doubt its being a faithful representation of the spirit, and consequently of the fate, "of those rulers of the world, who, desirous of defeating one another, exert their utmost strength," till their efforts are crowned by mutual extermination. Here again the history of our own country affords us an illustration. The Wars of the Roses formed the Mahabharata of the Norman nobility, in which so large a proportion of their number perished by mutual slaughter, leaving their places in the State to be filled up by promotions from the ranks of the conquered people.

While the Kshattriyas were thus absorbed or violently destroyed, the Vaisyas and the Sudras were becoming ever more and more inextricably confused. Community of interests and equality of condition must have generally tended to encourage such fusion, consequences of the comparatively depressed condition to which the lower ranks of the Aryan conquerors found themselves reduced by the union for common aggrandizement between their military and spiritual superiors. This process of fusion went on until the scrutiny of the strict Brahmin genealogists could find no undoubted representatives of the twice-born race outside the pale of their own order, and even therein were contained many doubtful pretenders to the nobility conferred by pure Brahmin descent.*

* Aujourd'hui il n'y a plus dans l'Inde de purs Aryens que les brahmanes et encore beaucoup d'entre eux, qui passent pour de faux brahmanes tardivement affiliés à la caste suprême, n'ont-ils aucun droit à revendiquer un titre de noblesse qu'ils s'arrogent sans preuves.

M. Pavie. *Révue des deux Mondes*, 15 janv. 1858, p. 258.

CHAPTER II.

PRESENT STATE OF CASTE.

A MODERN French writer commences an article on India very characteristically by the following anecdote: — An Arab merchant in his account of his voyages of trade tells us, that on his way from the Red Sea to China, as his vessel neared the coast of Malabar, he observed an Indian devotee standing in a fixed attitude, and absorbed in profound contemplation. Again after sixteen years making the same voyage, and nearing the same coast, he observed the devotee in the same attitude, and still absorbed in contemplation. "Such," adds, M. Pavie, "has been the history of India through her many centuries of existence."* The popular

* M. Pavie, *Révue des deux Mondes*, 1er mai. 1856.

notion of the immutability of Indian institutions did not require to be further strengthened by so neat an application of a traveller's tale. As it is, this notion is but too much exaggerated. If we compare the revolutions of India and Europe for the last two millenniums and a half, it is true that we shall find the changes really more important in the latter country than in the former, as well as more apparent. So too, if we make the comparison between India and Western Asia, we shall again decide in favour of the latter, which has seen the worship of Baal and Ashtaroth, first adulterated, and then obliterated, by the successive overflows of Hellenism, Christianity, and Mohammedanism. These however are the only portions of the earth's surface, which can be said to have surpassed India in exhibiting the ingenuity and activity of the human mind. If we look at China this will be apparent. There, until but recently, we could find scarcely the elements of a revolution, either political or religious; no turbulent Rajpoots—no sharp contrasts of creeds—

no endless division of small States—no thirst after immortality—no earnest searching after truth. Too much importance should not be attached to ethnological distinctions, yet we may perhaps venture to assert that the capacities of the Mongolian race for developing an original civilization appear from history to be limited—to be, in fact, incapable of producing unaided anything more than mere mechanical improvement. The very religion of China owes its origin to a Kshattriya prince in Arya-verta.

In the preceding chapter we have attempted to notice briefly many great and important changes distinguishing different sections of Indian history.* There we have had to glance at revolutions, at once fundamental and extensive, altering the meaning of words and institutions, and among others that of *caste*. We have shown that traces of the catastrophe, which destroyed the

* A notice of the important religious revolution effected by the preaching of Sakya-mani, the founder of Buddhism, and of its effects upon caste, has been reserved till we come to discuss the relations between caste and Christianity, in the last chapter.

great social edifice of the India of Menu's Code, are to be found in contemporary and subsequent literature. We shall find its traces also in the state of Indian society as it is. This resembles nothing so much as the miserable hovels to be found clustered around the few columns yet standing of the temples raised by the Seleucidæ —hovels into whose walls have been built up the fragments of shattered friezes and cornices, their ornaments mutilated, their inscriptions almost obliterated, and the whole so incongruously misarranged as to bewilder the antiquary, and excite the ridicule of the traveller. The institutions of modern India consist in great part of such portions of the ancient systems as have survived the rise of new opinions religious and philosophical, class rivalries, civil discords, and a succession of foreign invasions. Perpetuated amid conditions of society different to those amid which they originated, their meanings have been misunderstood, and their tendencies perverted.

Having accounted for the origin of caste, as the result of a conquest, at first marking a dif-

ference in race, it will, perhaps, be instructive to notice a difficulty which the historian Elphinstone found in accepting such an explanation. It is rendered *primâ facie* probable by the very word "*varna*," that is, "colour," the word whereby the Hindus have always designated caste. It is further suggested by the difference between the personal appearance of the higher classes and that of the Sudras, which is so observable even at the present day. He finds however a difficulty in the fact that the class most unlike the Brahmins are the Chandalas, "who are nevertheless," continues he, "originally the offspring of a Brahmin mother."* Such certainly is the account given of their origin in that authority, which seems to be always cited for every misconception or exaggerated statement, to wit, the *Mânava-dharma-sastra*, or Code of Menu. But the account

* *History of India*, Book I. chap. 5, p. 49. I have left unnoticed in the text his objection that there is no mention made in the Vedas of any country out of India. We know now that the Vedas, taken in conjunction with later works in Hindu literature, do show a continual advance of Hinduism from Cabul to Cape Comorin, which implies a movement whose origin must have been still farther to the north-west.

there given of the origin of the so-called mixed castes is as evidently mythical as the fable of the procession of the Sudra from Brahma's foot. We find traces, at least, of a tribe of aborigines called Chandalas.* They were subdued perhaps the last, or nearly the last, before the complete settlement of Arya-verta, occupying in all probability the country bordering on that of the Bhils. In the south of India we find that, when Hinduized Sudras conquered a country, they followed out the policy which the Aryans had carried out against them, reducing the inhabitants to an inferior caste known under various names as Pariahs, Poliars, &c. It is, therefore, perfectly intelligible, that the Chandalas, losing their savage independence later, and being thus later in point of admission into the Brahminical community, than the Sudras, should be classed as a caste below them. When then the author of the Code would express his horror of unions between Sudras and Brahmin women, he does so by ranking the issue

* Σύδροι· Κάνδαλοι· Φυλλῖται.—Ptol. vii. 61–66, referred to in *Christianity and Hinduism*, p. 278.

of such unions in the same caste with the last and lowest of the conquered tribes. In like manner one who now-a-days in Tanjore forfeits caste takes rank with the Pariah by descent, and is called by the same name. Finally it seems rational to suppose that the word "*varna*" was first used to denote the national difference between the conquerors and the conquered, and its signification was afterwards extended so as to denote the artificial distinctions of caste. The comparative purity of the Aryan descent of the Brahmins prevented the term ever becoming wholly meaningless and obsolete.*

When the ideas first of scrutinizing the purity of men's descent, and then of reckoning a particular occupation as the badge of the result of that scrutiny, had once pervaded Indian society, they were pushed to their logical conclusion with a most Hindu-like disregard of practical consequences. All that were suspected were divided,

* "The *complexion* of the Brahmins of this part of India is lighter than the average."—Dr. Pickering (speaking of Bombay), in his *Races of Man*, p. 270. The italics are mine.

lest they might convey some taint into the nobility of those whose descent was clear and undoubted. A party of Brahmins emigrate from one part of India to another. The Brahmins there in possession doubt or pretend to doubt the purity of the blood of the intruders, and refuse to intermarry with them. These new-comers set up a counter-claim of superior purity of birth, and anticipate by refusal the denial of the *jus connubii*. The Brahmins all over India form a separate race and do not intermarry with the rest of the inhabitants. In each of the great divisions of the country they keep exclusively to themselves, and thus rival "*nations*" of Brahmins are formed.* Still this is not enough. Certain families consider their blood less open to suspicion than that of their brethren of the same nation. They determine to keep it so, and form themselves into a *sreni*, or clan. Some are reduced by poverty to follow occupations generally considered beneath the dig-

* See Malcolm's *Central India*, vol. ii. pp. 115–125, for an account of the mutual jealousies of the *nations* of Brahmins in Central India.

nity of their position. Their brethren forthwith refuse to intermarry with them, till perhaps poverty becomes universal, and brings them all to the same level.*

Among Rajpoots these distinctions of *srenis* and subcastes are even more conspicuous than among Brahmins. The Rajpoots are a caste of uncertain origin. The most popular theory in India is that they are the sons of Kshattriya kings by Sudra women. This theory is expressed in their name "the sons of kings." Whatever their origin, they are as jealous and proud of their lineage as any of the old Spaniards. They are divided into a number of clans (sometimes loosely called *castes*), Rhathores, Chonhans, Powars, Sombunsies, &c. Most of these clans have a chief, who, as among the Highlanders, is the recognized head of the family. He is generally a raja in Rajast'han or Bundelcund, but the clan may be spread from Guzerat to

* See the case of the Kunojee Brahmins, reduced to hold their own ploughs, mentioned in Sleeman's *Official Tour in Oude*, vol. ii. pp. 40 and 109.

Behar. In the estimation of Rajpoots, as of Brahmins, it is incestuous to marry into one's own clan.* Every Rajpoot who is rich enough tries to marry his daughter into a clan of superior rank, but to do so is often obliged to pay a most exorbitant dowry.† Those, on the other hand, who are poor and of high-caste clans sell their daughters to the rich and ambitious of inferior rank. Thus every Rajpoot, too poor to adopt the first course, and too proud for the second, would feel that his daughters, remaining unmarried in their father's house, would prove to him a burden and disgrace. Hence has arisen the abominable practice of murdering their female infants as soon as they are born. This custom of infanticide prevails in almost every Rajpoot village from Jeysulmair to Nepal. Such a contempt does the organiza-

* In Bundelcund, where the principal chiefs are of the Bundela, and their feudatories are of the Dhundela and Powar clans, the chiefs must marry into the families of their vassals. The whole people from prince to peasant are thus indissolubly linked together by ties of kindred.—Sleeman's *Rambles and Recollections*, vol. i. p. 242.

† Sleeman's *Journey through Oude*, vol. i. pp. 237–8.

tion of caste give them for public opinion that, whenever they have had the power so to do, they have persevered in the practice of such crimes, although well knowing that it renders them objects of horror, not only to Europeans and Mohammedans, but also to Brahmins and to the great mass of other Hindus.*

From the Rajpoots we may pass on to the consideration of the other so-called "mixed castes," that is, castes formed by alliances between members of different castes. Many of them, no doubt, have such an origin. The Bhilalahs, for instance, may be really what they are said to be, the offspring of Rajpoots and Bhils.† The Bhils are an aboriginal tribe, who have maintained their independence in the mountains south of Rajast'han. Such of their clans as border on the Rajpoots are in many cases headed by Bhilalah chiefs. These chiefs not only pride themselves upon the admixture of Rajpoot blood in their veins, but

* Sleeman's *Official Tour*, vol. ii. p. 250.

† Malcolm's *Central India*, vol. ii. p. 155.

are held on that account in greater esteem by their Bhil subjects.

But doubtless the great producing cause of these "mixed castes" was the opening up of new lines of profitable industry, which, while they commended themselves to some as a relief to their necessities or as a means of acquiring wealth, would to others appear to involve a degradation from respectability. Hence certain trades would be followed by outcasts from other trades. The callings of sweepers and shoemakers necessitate contacts considered as polluting; that of fishermen necessitates the destruction of animal life. We find those who follow such callings held in disrepute. The shoemakers throughout almost all India are excluded from all the towns and villages.*

Another interesting example of a caste formed by the opening up of a new branch of industry, and of the consequent formation of peculiar caste-

* Malcolm's *Central India*, vol. ii. p. 179. For a fearful picture of the degradation of such castes in the South of India, see the Abbé Dubois on India, p. 459.

prejudices, is that of the *Cayasthas* or *Cayets*. These are throughout Hindostan the clerks in all public offices. They form a sub-caste, claiming Sudra descent. They appear to have been produced by the Mohammedan conquest. The high-caste Brahmins were probably repelled by disgust, half patriotic, half religious, from having anything to do with the public business of their conquerors and persecutors. At the same time the Mohammedans introduced a government more centralized and regular, which required a large amount of official correspondence. From the highly respectable character of their employment, these clerks have a caste rule against entering into menial situations, holding it unworthy of those hands, which God had formed for so noble an occupation as writing, that they should be employed in any meaner work. As, in the case of the Rajpoot practice of infanticide, we had an instance of the worst effects of caste in fostering the most inordinate family pride, so in the case of the Cayet we see an instance of its counterbalancing good effects in developing in a man a

legitimate satisfaction in his own peculiar calling, and an honest ambition to do his duty in that state of life in which it has pleased God to call him.*

To the preceding sources of caste distinction we must add the affiliation of barbarian and aboriginal tribes who embrace Hinduism. It is commonly supposed that the Brahminical system admits no converts. Such may be the theory; the practice is far otherwise. Any body of men would be considered as Hindus, if they supported Brahmins to pray and perform sacred rites for them. The English in India might thus become Brahminists. They would merely be added to the long list of existing Hindu castes. Other castes would not eat nor intermarry with them, but that they do not do with one another. Not only might this happen, but in fact the majority of Brahminists in India are converts and accretions to the original Hindus. One of the latest of such accretions are the well-known Goorkhas, a tribe of Tartars dominant in Nepal. Formerly without the pale of

* Malcolm's *Central India*, vol. ii. pp. 165-168.

Brahminism, and destitute of caste, they are now, in consequence of military successes, of such high caste, that their chiefs have succeeded in obtaining in marriage the daughters of Rajpoots. The Jats furnish us with another instance of a tribe of low caste, or rather of no caste at all, aspiring to caste rank. They attained to military renown and territorial dominion by the sword, and now seek the distinction of high caste, to enable them the better to enjoy their position in society. This they attempt by taking up scruples against eating meat and killing animals, inasmuch as the Hindu ideal of a low-caste man is one who "sub kooch khata," sticks at nothing in the way of eating.*

In addition to all the above-mentioned sources of caste distinction, we should remember, that, in the estimation of Hindus, every man, no matter what his nation or religion, belongs to a caste. Thus the Jews in India are spoken of as one caste, and the Parsees as another. We may now understand that in the neighbourhood of

* Sleeman's *Rambles and Recollections*, vol. ii. p. 21.

Puna the historian Elphinstone counted a hundred and fifty different castes, while he observes that there was no reason for supposing that they were more numerous there than elsewhere. Such multiplicity and confusion may be easily imagined to perplex any one who in India attempts to reduce into a systematic arrangement the castes by which he is surrounded, the causes which produced their existence, and the effects of their existence on society.

The perpetual wars of which India has been the scene have introduced into this chaos new elements of confusion. These wars have scattered over the face of the country tribes, once confined within a limited area. Thousands have been carried into captivity while as yet too young to remember the castes to which they belonged. The large extent of a continent, unbroken by arms of the sea or similar impediments to migration, has afforded facilities for a continual flux and reflux of tribes and individuals. Such movements have been rendered still easier by the fact that the Hindustani language is more

or less understood over two-thirds of that vast territory. Well, then, may we say of what we find complicated by so many circumstances,—"Caste is a wide subject, difficult to be understood even by those who have mixed much among the people and gradually acquired their knowledge piecemeal."*

As the disturbed state of India has exercised a marked influence upon caste-feeling, weakening it by rendering its object doubtful and the enjoyment of it insecure; so has it tended to make this feeling vary in intensity according to the fortunes of the different portions of the country. On the banks of the Ganges and the Jumna, which have felt every wave of Moslem conquest since the days of Mohammed of Ghuzni, caste is not so strong as in Tanjore, which had scarcely felt the pressure of Mohammedan rule till within the last century.† But where caste-

* Shore's *Notes on Indian Affairs*, No. LXI. vol. ii. p. 470.

† The Hindu princes of Tanjore and Trichinopoli had never been subdued by the Mogul. Even Aurungzeb did not cross the frontier of Tanjore. (Elphinstone's *History of India*, p. 575.) Although at times compelled to purchase the

feeling now prevails in greatest strength is among the Nairs of Malabar. They contrived to keep aloof from the struggles with the Moslems, which had destroyed so many Hindu states, until they were invaded and partially reduced by Hyder Ali, and afterwards by his son Tippoo Sultan of Mysore.* In the war which the last-named fanatical tyrant waged against the British government, the Nairs rose in insurrection, and at his downfall were found in arms on the successful side. Their privileges were consequently recognized by the paramount power, and remain as one of the few vestiges still remaining of the fearful spirit of ancient heathen aristocracy. Between the Nair and the Poliar, between the lord and the helot, there is no pretence of a community of feelings or interest. Caste in

forbearance of the Mohammedan sovereigns of Bijapur and Golconda, they had preserved their independence until the struggle between the English and French broke out in the Carnatic. See the note by Professor Wilson, in his edition of Mill's *British India*, vol. iii. p. 67.

* Makhdum Sahib, brother in law of Hyder Ali, headed, in 1757, the first Moslem army that ever entered Malabar. Colonel Wilks's *Historical Sketches*, vol. i. p. 360.

Malabar is something more than the mere matter of forms and ceremonies, to which it is for the most part reduced elsewhere in India. If travelling on the highway, the Poliar must take care not to approach a man of the dominant caste. He must go off into the jungle in order to keep the necessary distance. If through inadvertence he neglect this degrading precaution, death is the recognized penalty. The Nair's caste is so pure that on returning from market he must before entering his house take and change his clothes, lest unwittingly he bring in something that may defile his homestead.

We have spoken of caste as a matter of punctilious and ceremonial defilements. It is interesting to see how these have been waived in cases where convenience or strong feelings have so required. Even in Menu's Code it is expressly stated that not only the king is always pure, but so also are all whose services he may require in affairs of State. Although at the present day to eat food cooked by one of lower caste involves degradation, yet this rule does not apply

to baked bread or to confectioneries, which are bought freely in the shops by persons of all classes without any question being asked as to the caste-rank of the baker or the shopman. Generally throughout India caste has become a matter of social rank and standing, depending for its maintenance upon the opinion of a man's caste-fellows. Expulsion from caste is a penalty inflicted by them on one of their number who has offended the community by some breach of the moral law or of social etiquette. If, however, his fault be not very grave, the offender seldom finds it difficult to obtain a re-entry into caste-privileges. But so weak is the hold which caste-feeling has upon men's minds that this re-entry is not always desired. A writer on India tells the story of a poor carpenter turned out of his caste, whom his caste-fellows offered to reinstate in his previous position, if he would give them a feast which was to cost twenty rupees. "That," said he, "is more than the matter is worth," and in order to belong to some set or other turned Mohammedan. General Sleeman

found that many of the Hindu grooms and grass-cutters in his employ turned Mohammedans merely for the sake of eating, drinking, and smoking with their fellow-servants who were of that religion.

But in the opinion of Hindus there is a great difference between re-entry into a man's original caste and the attainment of a caste-rank superior to his own. The former is recognized not only among grooms and carpenters, but even among the highest classes of the community. For a prince who had forfeited caste the ingenious avarice of the Brahmins devised the following method of restoration. An image of a cow was made of gold, in which the prince was enclosed. Then with appropriate ceremonies and hymns the officiating priest opened the image and released him. In gratitude for this new birth the prince of course had the cow broken up and its fragments distributed among the Brahmins. At a public meeting of that caste in Calcutta it was even settled what should be the regular fine, upon the payment of which Brahmins, who had denied the Veda, broken the sacrificial thread, submitted

to baptism, and eaten the flesh of the sacred cow and impure hog, should be restored to the rights and privileges of the "twice-born."

On the other hand, the notion of the attainment of Brahminhood by one not born to that estate is met by a contemptuous denial of the possibility of such elevation; and that too in spite of the instances of such elevation recorded in their early sacred literature. Such instances are brought up against them by their Buddhist opponents in their arguments against what we may call the religious disabilities of caste. The Brahmins attempt to meet the argument by showing that such changes took place under earlier dispensations, and, as we should say, in the Golden Age, but that in this *Kali Yoga*, the present Iron Age of the world, they are no longer possible. Nor is this answer devoid of historical truth. We find everywhere that the social exclusiveness of an order of nobles generally increases in the same proportion as their real superiority and their consequent privileges diminish, until what was originally a natural and expansive aristocracy shrinks into a narrow and

artificial oligarchy. From the extinction which is the usual fate of such bodies, the Brahmins have been preserved partly by their numbers, partly by the fact that their rank did not depend upon their occupations or positions in life. Though a Brahmin at the present day may be a menial in the service of impure barbarians, subjected to oppression and insult from sacrilegious Moslems, though he may be unacquainted with the Vedas and unobservant of the "daily sacraments," he is still animated by the pride of race, which inspired the author of the Code when he taught that "a Brahmin, *whether learned or unlearned*, is a powerful divinity, for from his *high birth alone* he is an object of veneration even to the gods."

CHAPTER III.

THE CHARACTER OF CASTE AND ITS EFFECTS CONSIDERED.

The preceding chapter has shown how confused and varied is Indian caste at the present day, and by how many circumstances the intensity of caste-feeling is modified in different portions of that vast territory. The imperfect outline there given sufficiently proves the difficulty of generalizing on its character or its effects. Selecting, however, the most prominent of such effects for discussion in the present chapter, we shall consider, first, its relation to public spirit.

We have observed upon the tendency of modern Indian castes to subdivide themselves infinitely. An interesting parallel to this may be found no farther from home than in the France of the last century. A similar cause

had then produced a similar state of feeling in the national mind. There the presence in society of the privileged orders, the nobility and the clergy, begot in every one an intense desire to belong to some order distinguished by some privilege or other, no matter how insignificant. There we find ideas of superiority and precedency among different trades, which neither would bring to trial, but preferred each to hold aloof from the other in foolish isolation. M. de Tocqueville mentions the case of the periwig-makers of La Flêche, who decided to abandon all share in the public business of the community rather than submit to the precedency of the bakers.*

Of course these feelings of *caste* (they are so called by M. de Tocqueville himself) were not in France identical with those that prevail in India. They differed in their manifestations. Yet the cause of this difference was the same in both cases. The privileged orders in India distinguished themselves by punctilios about eating

* *La France et la Révolution*, par M. le comte Alexis de Tocqueville, livre ii. chap. ix.

and drinking, and ceremonial defilement. The castes among the lower orders in India distinguished themselves one from another by means of similar scruples. The privileged orders in France distinguished themselves principally by transacting all business, political and municipal, apart. In this respect the castes into which the French *bourgeoisie* was divided, sought to imitate the *noblesse*. The resemblance between these two caste-systems was carried out in the tendencies, which all the castes exhibited, to subdivide themselves without end. The pettiest points of difference were eagerly seized on for that purpose. The French writer we have referred to compares these little societies in France, to those chemical bodies which the analyst is continually proving to be compounds, by resolving them into their component parts. Now what are the effects upon society at large, upon its history and its interests, which he attributes to these tendencies? "Chacune de ces petites sociétés ne vit donc que pour soi, ne s'occupe que de soi, n'a d'affaires que celles que la touchent."

This absorption of public spirit, by a spirit of class interest, is found to be as much the case in India, as ever it was in France. This prevents in so great a part of India the formation of a nationality, rightly so called. What appear in modern Indian history as nationalities are in reality many nationalities subjected (and that often but very temporarily) to some one nationality or caste, which has possessed itself of supreme power in the district. Such is the case with the Jauts, with the Mahrattas, to a still greater degree with the Sikhs. If we leave out of consideration the independent aborigines, it is difficult to find many districts even approaching to homogeneity in their population. Hence we find that almost everywhere the mass of the population look upon the fortune and honour of the State as something entirely foreign to their sympathies; and only affecting themselves, if at all, indirectly through their material interests. "It is a singular fact," observes General Sleeman, "that the peasantry, and I may say, the landed interest of the country generally, have never

been the friends of any existing government—have never considered their interest and that of their government the same; and consequently have never felt any desire for its success or its duration."* A political system based upon such a foundation, is peculiarly liable to be suddenly overthrown. Hence we see so many Indian governments destroyed by foreign invasion facilitated by the indifference with which the progress of the enemy is regarded by all the castes except that one which founds and governs the State.

At the same time we must be careful not to press this matter too far. Although caste renders Hindus too often indifferent to the fate of their sovereigns, it does not therefore render them indifferent to the good opinion of their neighbours. "No people," said one who had great opportunities of judging, "no people have so much public spirit as the people of India."† These words he goes on to explain as having reference to

* Sleeman's *Rambles and Recollections of an India Official* vol. ii. p. 175.

† *Ibid.* vol. ii. chap. 14.

the local improvements which they constantly carry out for the benefit of their immediate neighbourhood. That this public spirit is not displayed to a greater extent than it is, he attributes to the severity of the fiscal laws, to which all their recent rulers, whether Moslem, Mahratta, or British, have subjected them. We should also take into account the character of modern Indian governments before we attribute to caste-feeling the apathy and want of loyalty of their subjects. These governments neither owed their origin to the people, nor conferred great benefits upon them; and it was but natural that their fall should be regarded with unconcern by populations to whom they appeared merely in the unamiable capacity of tax-gatherers.

We have cited the testimony of General Sleeman in support of our assertion that modern Indian governments are for the most part regarded by their subjects with a sort of passive disloyalty. That this feeling is in great measure produced by caste distinctions between the governors and the governed, may be illustrated by

an exception noticed by the same authority. He was riding across a small principality in Bundelcund, which was about to be annexed by the paramount power on account of the misgovernment of its ruler. His "belted attendant," the guide that ran afoot by the side of his horse, was a poor man reduced to beggary by a recent famine, and shivering from an insufficiency of clothing. "Even this poor unclothed and starving wretch had a feeling of patriotism, a pride of country, and he seemed quite melancholy at the thought of seeing this principality, the oldest in Bundelcund, lose its independence." This feeling of nationality, which exists in the small states of Bundelcund, is explained by General Sleeman as arising from the homogeneity of the population, who are Rajpoots of the Bundela and other clans, united by intermarriage, according to the rule noticed in the last chapter. The governors and the governed being thus united by ties of kindred, and animated by a common feeling of nationality, the public establishments are recruited almost exclusively from the nation, contrary to the rule

which prevails in most Indian states. For instance, the only principalities in Bundelcund in which the reigning family is not Rajpoot are Thansee and Jalore. While the population is of the same character as in the neighbouring states, their rulers are Brahmins, who recruit for the public service from all classes and all countries.*

It has been further objected that caste tends to destroy enterprise and a desire for improvement; that it induces an illiberal attachment to old errors, and condemns every man to remain in that state of life wherein he was born. This may have been the intent of many of the regulations to be found in ancient Hindu books on the subject. Modern Hindu practice is however very far from being conformed to such regulations.

"In cases of distress" a Brahmin is permitted by Menu's Code to become a soldier, and to practise the *dhanur veda*, the science of the bow or military art. † In still greater distress he may

* Sleeman's *Rambles and Recollections*, vol. i. pp. 236, 241.

† Muir's *Sanskrit Texts*, part i. p. 170.

become a cultivator, or even a shopkeeper, provided that he does not deal in certain prohibited articles. That he should ever become a menial is not contemplated, but, should all the above modes of life fail him, minute directions are given as to the manner in which he should beg—a last resort, which the author of the Code could not believe to be other than successful.* Yet at the present day, especially in the South, Brahmins are in request as cooks, an occupation by the by everywhere a sign of respectable, if not of high caste. Nor do they serve Sudras only, as menials, but even Europeans—"impure *Mlechchas*," as their holy books would call them. Their position may be illustrated by the following instance. A civilian in a part of the Punjab, where Brahmins are not numerous, had one in his service as a bearer. When, however, this bearer had to accompany his master to that part of the country whence he came, he requested that his personal attendance might be dispensed with during that visit, as the unsuitableness of his occupation and his rank

* Menu, x. 81, et seq.

would excite the prejudices of his brethren. "Yet," continued he, "you know, sahib, that I have always kept my caste." He knew that the tendency of the age was to disregard feelings purely aristocratic, and to consider also a man's actual station and position in life. The same spirit that would send them to attend the levée of a parvenu Sudra, would, in all probability, have made them exact of him a fine, before they would eat with one who, though of their own caste, had demeaned himself by becoming the servant of a Feringhi. Such things are, however, far from uncommon. Shore mentions the case of an Englishman who had for valets-de-chambre, a Brahmin, a Rajpoot, a Gosaen, and a Mussulman.*

Nor is menial service the only degrading means of livelihood, to which the hard practical tendencies of this age, of this *Kali Yoga*, has reduced the Brahmin in spite of theories about his high place in the world. "One who performs many sacrifices for other men," and a gambler, are classed together by Menu's Code

* Shore's *Notes on Indian Affairs*, vol. ii. p. 477.

in the list of persons to whom food is never to be offered at sacred obsequies.* Nevertheless, at the present day the number of such professional priests is very numerous. Further, the poverty of the Brahmins leads them to officiate in idol-temples, an occupation strictly destructive of true Brahminhood.† In this profession their caste gives them an advantage over men of lower classes. The argument of Micah the Ephraimite, "Now know I that the Lord will do me good, seeing I have a Levite to my priest," suggests itself to many minds in modern India.

Besides these two classes of Brahmins, we find numbers of that caste engaged throughout India in the old Vedic situation of *pirohitas*, or, as we might call them, domestic chaplains, of military barons and village chiefs. In this the iron age of Hinduism these *pirohitas* have lost even that imperfect respect which Menu's Code allowed them. In these days of self-will and scepticism they have but little moral power left wherewith they might influence their Rajpoot patrons,

* Menu, iii. 151. † Ibid. iii. 152.

and their functions now chiefly consist in taking upon themselves the guilt of their lords' transgressions both of the ceremonial and moral law, especially of their abominable practice of female infanticide. Under such circumstances we cannot be surprised to learn that few other Brahmins will condescend to eat, drink, or associate with them.*

The authorized licence, "in cases of distress," extended to the twice-born, would *à fortiori* be used without express authority by members of castes more recent in origin and less elevated in rank. A new art, a new branch of industry, if manifestly profitable, commands recruits in India just as elsewhere. We have already noticed as an instance the rise of the Cayets or writers.† The indisposition to adopt improvements, whether in agriculture or in other matters, is of much less strength than Europeans commonly suppose. But were it even of such strength, it is difficult

* Sleeman's *Official Tour in Oude*, vol. ii. p. 34.

† The first good Hindu miniature painter, in the European manner, was a blacksmith.—Elphinstone's *History of India*, p. 56.

to see why it should be attributed to caste, seeing that it shows itself among all imperfectly civilized nations.

Before a nation makes experiments and adopts expensive improvements, it is necessary that it should enjoy peace and security, which it has been the lot of but few portions of India to enjoy, even during the comparatively peaceful period of the English *raj*, and should further have acquired wealth and capital, which the agriculturists of India have not yet done. It is moreover to be observed that of such improvements in mechanics as are adapted to their circumstances they readily avail themselves.* The small value of time and human labour in India, as compared with this rich country, must be taken into the account as rendering many of our inventions, here so useful, there of comparatively little advantage.

Nor is it only in *mechanical* arts that the ready pliability of the Hindu is shown. In India, as compared with the Mohammedans, the Hindus are remarkable for their liberality of sentiment, and

* Shore's *Notes*, vol. ii. p. 55; also No. liii. *passim*.

the facility with which they accommodate themselves to European ideas, whenever it tends clearly to their advantage so to do. Take, for instance, the English colleges at Bombay. An intelligent Parsee,* instituting a comparison in point of liberality of feeling on the subject of education between his own people and the Hindus (to the advantage certainly of the former), adds that it is unnecessary to take into consideration the Mussulman part of the population, as with but few exceptions they are opposed to all innovation.

That caste does not prevent a man from raising himself above the rank of life in which he was born, is proved by many facts in recent Indian history. As we have seen that Brahmins in numberless instances sink below, so do we find Sudras often rising above the hierarchical regulations of Menu's Code. Many of the rich Baboos of Calcutta are Sudras, and by their wealth, as the old legist naïvely confesses, "give pain to Brahmins."† The families of Scindia and Holkar,

* *The Parsees*, by Dosabhoy Framjee, p. 189.

† Menu, x. 129. This is one of the passages referred to by

among the most powerful of the present native princes, are both of Sudra origin. Ranojee Scindia, the first of that family who rose to distinction, was of the Koombee or cultivator caste. He succeeded his father as *patel* or head-man of a small village in the Deccan. He entered the service of the Peishwa as a menial. In that situation he attracted his master's notice, who promoted him to military rank. He rose rapidly, and became of such importance that he was required to affix his name as an additional guarantee to the treaty concluded in 1743 between the Mogul Emperor and the Peishwa. The signature of another Mahratta chief was further required by the Mogul. This was Mulhar Row Holkar. He not only belonged by birth to the Dhoongur or Shepherd caste, but in

Mr. Buckle in his exaggerated estimate of Sudra degradation. Following Mill in this point among others, he will consider Menu's Code as a description of what was the actual state of things, instead of what certain Brahmins thought ought to be the case. The expression of envious feeling in the text seems to us to be evidently the result of experimental knowledge.

early life actually kept the sheep of the family.* The last Peishwa had, at different times, two prime ministers; of these one had been either an officiating priest or a singer in a temple (both of them degrading employments), and the other was a Sudra and originally a running footman. Elphinstone remarks that "there is indeed scarcely any part of the world where changes of condition are so striking and so sudden as in India."†

It is at the same time undoubtedly true that caste renders the working classes in India more contented with their station and position in life than they otherwise would be, more so, indeed, than they are in many European countries. This is one of those advantages which compensate for so much that is objectionable in the institution. "The veriest Chandala," says an historian of India, "who is one of a community, is less miserable, less unhappy than many of the paupers of the civilized communities of Europe, with

* Malcolm's *Central India*, vol. i. pp. 94, 95, and chapters 5 and 6.

† *History of India*, book ii. chap. i.

whom no man owns companionship or kindred; they are true outcasts."*

An interesting instance of the adherence of the lower orders to their caste is cited by M. Burnouf† from the life of Sakya-muni. When pressed by his family to marry, the young prince-reformer declares that he does not attach any weight to the prejudices of caste, and will choose his wife from any class whatever, provided that he can find one who corresponds to the type of perfection which he has imagined. The Brahmin acting as *pirohita*, or domestic chaplain in the royal household, undertakes the search after a damsel so endowed, and at last reports that he has found her in the person of a daughter of an artizan in Kapila-vasta, named Dandapani. The king, therefore, sends for the handicraftsman, and asks him to give his daughter in marriage to the prince. The handicraftsman first shows the unsuitableness of their union on account of the exalted station and superior education of the

* Professor Wilson in a note to Mill's *History of India*, vol. i. p. 140.

† *Introduction à l'Histoire du Buddhisme Indien*, pp. 151, 152.

royal suitor, and then goes on to object that "it is a law of our family to give our daughters in marriage to those who have knowledge of some trade, and to none other. Now the prince has no knowledge of any trade." This objection appears to the king insuperable, and Sakya himself condescends to argue the point, and to show that in fact the acquirements of a liberal education must be considered as his regular occupation or trade.

To this instance we may add the answer which a Brahmin on the western coast gave to Dr. Pickering* when he inquired into the intermarriage of the castes. The answer was to the effect that if he, the Brahmin, asked in marriage a daughter of the Mhars—a contingency of course highly improbable, or rather, morally impossible—they would certainly return him a refusal; yet the Mhars are there reckoned as one of the lowest castes in that part of the country, being, in fact, an aboriginal tribe which has been but recently and partially Hinduized. So true is it that the

* *Races of Men*, chap. xiii. p. 271.

lowest members of society among these Hindus still feel the pride of caste.

Another important phase, under which caste presents itself to our notice, is that of a national discipline. Every one who has candidly studied the history of India will allow that, with all its inevitable shortcomings, Brahminical civilization and Brahminical religion effected great improvement in the state of the country and the condition of the people. Now, although India has advanced and improved in many respects since the Mohammedan era, it cannot be questioned but that in many respects she has suffered from the turbulence and insecurity, which prevailed while the Moslems were establishing their empire, and during the period which intervened between the death of Aurungzeb and the establishment of our authority as paramount. During those troublous times Brahminical India may be likened to an army in full retreat after a disastrous battle—defeated but not destroyed, and still bearing with it the greater part of its baggage. The victorious enemy presses on its rear; in front the passes

are held by the hill-robbers; the jungle on either side makes desertion easy; everything is lost if there be not discipline. It must be a discipline too, which descends into detail. The army must not only be disciplined as a whole; every corps must be so disciplined as to act independently for itself, whenever occasion require. Such an organization was supplied by the institution of caste. Here every man found his place appointed for him; every one had a deposit, his share of Hindu tradition, religious ideas, morality, mechanical civilization, which was to be in his special keeping to be handed down to his children after him. There can be no doubt that caste has thus prevented civilized Sudras from relapsing into their original barbarism, has preserved the civilizing conquerors from being wholly engulfed in the mass of their less gifted subjects. This fate has ever beset colonists and conquerors when the numerical superiority has been greatly in favour of the conquered race. Such was the fate of the Hellenic colonies once studded along the shores of the Mediterranean. A similar fate

at the present day threatens the descendants of the Spaniards in South America.

Caste bears upon its very face the impress of an anti-social and exclusive character, and indeed it cannot be considered to foster or encourage the virtues of hospitality, social intercourse, or active charity. It should at the same time be borne in mind that the circular line which excludes, includes also. Caste feeling, like family feeling, though it may often stand in the way of benefiting the world at large, always confirms and strengthens our benevolent intentions and feeling towards those within the pale. Social intercourse is as polite among the upper classes in India, as anywhere else in the world. It does not seem to be burdened with a greater amount of insincerity and falsehood than among the subjects of other Asiatic despotisms ignorant of caste. As for the peasantry, their good-humour, cheerfulness, and openness of disposition, are vividly depicted by one who went out among them, and spoke their languages with ease; one whose delight it was to use such knowledge

in cultivating an acquaintance with the people over whom he was placed as a superior.* His anecdotes, like those of all who have studied their character in districts remote from our courts and their corrupting influences, represent them as sociable among themselves and with such strangers as they have no cause to fear. They may have many scruples about eating, contrary to our ideas of goodfellowship and hospitality,† but they have many exceptions to the rule which afford opportunities for social enjoyment and of showing social respect. Persons of the same rank and condition of life, although not of the same caste, can sit together sharing the betel-nut. That caste-rules against taking meals in common are neither productive of the same feelings nor regarded in the same light as they would be in Europe, we have the testimony of no

* For many familiar conversations with the peasantry of India, see Sleeman's *Rambles and Recollections*, and his *Official Tour in Oude.*

† Shore mentions cases, in which every kind of social intercourse, except eating, was kept up by high-caste families with members who had passed by marriage into inferior castes.—See *Notes on Indian Affairs*, vol. ii. p. 485.

less an authority than Professor Wilson. "That the productive classes may not eat or drink or intermarry with the castes above them, is no hardship to races, who would not avail themselves of the privileges of such intercourse with many of the castes who are their equals. These laws of segregation are in this case self-imposed. European writers can little understand the prevailing feelings of the Hindus in these matters. It is pride, not shame of caste that animates them down to the meanest; and the sweeper is more tenacious of his caste than the Brahmin. As to sitting with them, let a blacksmith acquire wealth, and he will have his levée well attended by Brahmins of the most respectable descent." *

As one of the most startling results of the unsocial nature of caste, the organization of our sepoy armies has been often referred to. It was argued that men were so divided by this caste-feeling, as to be incapable of combining even against masters so alien from them in race, civilization, manners, language, and religion as

* In a note to Mill's *History of India*, vol. i. p. 304.

ourselves. Such incapacity for combination has since been proved a lamentable and disastrous delusion. The popular ideas on the subject take accordingly an exactly opposite direction. It is caste, they say, that gives the facility for combination, that renders the bonds between conspirators of the same caste inviolable, and thus brought on us the mutiny of 1857.

There is, doubtless, a certain amount of truth in both these contradictory lines of reasoning; but this caste-feeling is in fact insufficient to explain either the subordination of the sepoys formerly, or the secrecy of their final conspiracy. Indeed the sepoys of the Bengal army were divided by distinctions fully as potent as those of caste. They were of different, often hostile, races and creeds, and their mother-tongues were in many cases mutually unintelligible. The wide extent of our dominions and of our influence gave us peculiar facilities for the formation of such an army. But the contemporary native princes maintained armies similar in composition. The wide-spread military despotism of the Mogul

empire, and the anarchy consequent upon its fall, had created a vast floating population of professional soldiers. Like the *condottieri* of Italy, who fought for any man that would hire them, and passed without scruple and without shame from the service of a Sforza to that of a Medici, these soldier-adventurers flocked at the first rumour of war to the camp of the leader whose service promised to be most profitable in pay and plunder. Neither the soldiers in their choice of a prince, nor the leader in his choice of his followers, had much regard for religion or nationality. Let us picture to ourselves the state into which Europe would have been reduced if the first French empire, instead of meeting the reverses of Spain and Moscow, had maintained itself at its highest pitch of power for several generations; we shall thus have some idea of India under the Mogul emperors. We can imagine that under such circumstances French, more or less dashed with foreign words and idioms, would become the "*Urdu*," or camp language of Europe. It would

form the medium of communication in a vast imperial army recruited from every nation between the Vistula and the Tagus. At home the old national prejudices, the differences in religion and language, would prevail with undiminished force. But in the ranks of the army a certain fusion would take place of all its various component parts into a homogeneous whole. The fusion which took place in the Bengal army was more perfect than in any other mercenary force in or out of India, through the permanence of our conquests, the regularity of our pay, and the glory with which the soldiers found themselves covered when they had, under the guidance of their European leaders, swept every military rival from the surface of India. They began to look upon themselves as the Bengal army rather than as men of different castes and creeds. Thus united, they thought themselves masters of the destiny of India. They began to keep an account of grievances, which are never wanting to those who think that redress is in their own hands. At length they rose and massacred their

military superiors, and expiated by a well-merited destruction their blunder and their crime.

A breach of caste observances was the spark which ignited the magazine of disaffection. But so widely separated are the English and their Indian subjects in customs, creed, traditions, and all else that influences men's conduct, that mortal offence could hardly fail sooner or later to be exchanged between them. It is this want of sympathy, of mutual understanding, which rendered a native army so difficult to manage. Then as to secrecy of the conspiracy, it should be remembered, that these sepoys were not of one caste nor even of one religion, but the majority of them belonged to the same country and language. They were Rajpoots, Brahmins, and Mohammedans, &c., but for the most part all natives of Hindostan properly so called. Thus their principle of union against us, so far as there was any over and above that *esprit de corps* above described, was national, rather than derived from caste-feeling.

There is, however, in India an unsocial spirit

which exercises a most marked and most pernicious influence upon the relations of society. But it is not so much to be considered consequent upon caste as a co-ordinate consequence of the same cause. In India there is but little community of religious feelings and knowledge between the more and less enlightened classes of the people. The Brahmins seem animated by the pharisaical sentiment, "This people which knoweth not the law are cursed." They seem to look on the lower castes as, in religious matters, but little superior to the lower animals, and, as it would be manifestly useless to attempt to teach even the elementary truths of religion to the latter, so is it to teach its higher truths to the former.* One of the results of this separation of the castes in religious worship and enlightenment is the licentious character of many popular rites, from which all Hindus of respectability hold aloof. It is ordained that the great mass of Hindus should belong to the inferior classes. Hence, argues the Brahminical mind, it is or-

* *Christianity and Hinduism*, p. 81.

dained that they should be idolaters and pass through life with minds darkened by delusions and errors sent by God himself, even as He sends the leprosy or the cholera. This is the selfishness and heartlessness of the old paganism, a result of what Neander calls its "aristocratic spirit," so nakedly avowed by the Emperor Julian, when he spoke with contempt of Christianity as being very loose and free inasmuch as it was designed for fishermen and dancing-girls.

It may be more legitimately objected to caste that it tends to confuse men's conceptions of morality. Every man having his own caste, and every caste having its special duties which all its members are bound to perform, and its special character which they are all bound to sustain; the attention of a Hindu is directed rather to the particular than to the universal idea of duty. They are thus in danger of forgetting the important truth that there is not only a Brahmin morality binding upon Brahmins, and a Sudra morality binding upon Sudras, but there are certain general laws binding upon

all men as men throughout the world, and taking precedence of all special duties incidental to particular stations and positions of life. Even at the best, man has but too strong a tendency to consider all that is customary as right—if anything is generally *allowed among* his set, to consider it *allowable for* his set in particular. The Hindu system of caste-morality is but this practice formed into a theory and promulgated by authority.

Of course this state of things is not without its counterbalancing advantages. In a heathen country like India, with but an imperfect ethical science, we can easily understand how it may there have conduced on the whole to the elevation of morality—that each section of the community should have its especial virtue to cultivate as a badge to distinguish it from others; nay, even that such sections should be divided into smaller sections, each the rival of the rest and claiming to be considered the most perfect in the practice of some particular excellence.

As the worst instance of the bad effects of caste

in this respect is afforded by the Rajpoots who systematically destroyed their female infants, so perhaps does the same caste furnish the strongest instances of its better tendency to produce and consolidate those virtues, which are based on self-respect and the good opinion of a man's immediate friends, the virtues of truth, fidelity, and chivalrous courage. "I am a Rajpoot, and will not deceive you, nor fail to do my utmost for you," was the boast of one of that noble race, although he belonged to a tribe that had for generations professed Islamism. To the corporate spirit fostered by caste we may attribute that commercial honesty which has been so much remarked among the native bankers in the less Europeanized parts of the country.

That the question, "Has caste on the whole been beneficial or injurious to the people of India?" is one which it is very difficult to answer categorically, has been proved by the number of contradictory influences which we have shown it to have exercised. Still we would incline to the opinion that its advantages in former ages

more than counterbalance its bad effects in the present day. This judgment commends itself still more to our approval, when we remember that caste has throughout its history shown a constant tendency to become ameliorated and mitigated by time and circumstances. From an outrageous pride of race in the Nair of Malabar, it graduates into the petty scruples of the washermen of Calcutta. Buddhism weakened it; the Mohammedan rule further weakened it; it remains to be destroyed or regenerated by Christianity. But the relations of caste and Christianity are so important and so complicated as to merit a separate chapter.

CHAPTER IV.

CASTE CONSIDERED IN ITS RELATIONS TO CHRISTIANITY.

HAVING considered caste under its most important moral, social, and religious aspects, this seems the proper place for asking the question so much mooted, "In what sense is caste a religious institution?" We would answer, albeit with some hesitation — Only so far as it prevails among a people professing the Brahminical religion; indeed, one is tempted to say professing the religion of the Vedas, for as Hinduism has departed further and further from the rigid ritual system of the Vedas, so has caste lost more and more its religious aspect and meaning, and has hardened, so to say, into a set of social technicalities. In the Vedic ages* the Brahmin is all-

* By these words I would not be understood to mean the age in which the *Rig Veda* was composed, but the whole

powerful, all-respected, as the link between men and gods, for whose sake, and by whose prayers, fasts, and sacrifices, this world is sustained. But when a long period of unadventurous, uneventful civilization had caused the Hindu mind to ponder on the great problems of existence, Kapila sceptically criticized the Veda, and taught that much that it contained was merely of temporary and imperfect obligation; the Yogi philosophy taught men that its discipline was more excellent than sacrifice; finally, Sakya-muni declared that the Veda was not divine, and that the path of liberation was open to all men without distinction of race or of caste. Under the older Brahminism, to be born a Brahmin in a future life is the reward of virtue in a Sudra.* To the Brahmin alone is it permitted to offer those sacrifices, to pursue those studies, to attain that knowledge which merit after death the highest and most excellent rewards. The Brahmins are not only

period preceding the rise of the philosophical schools of Kapila and Patanjali and the religious revolution of Sakya-muni.

* Menu, ix. 335.

the most exalted in this life, but they are also the best circumstanced as regards exaltation in the next. Of all the inhabitants of *Bharata Varsha*, as they called India, the position of the Brahmins is spiritually the most to be preferred; just as all its inhabitants enjoy advantages superior to those whose lot is cast in other regions. "Bharata is the most excellent division of Jambudwipa, for this is the land of works, while others are places of enjoyment. Here devotees perform austerities, and priests sacrifice; here gifts are bestowed to testify honour for the sake of the future world." *

Such being the case, how did Sakya-muni act, when he proclaimed the path of liberation not merely open to scavengers and barbarians, but open to them equally with kings and twice-born Brahmins? Did he declare that caste was contrary to "the good law," and abrogate amongst his disciples all such distinctions? Such has often been hastily assumed to be the case, from

* Quoted from the *Vishnu Purana*, in Muir's *Sanskrit Texts*, part i. p. 188.

a consideration of the state of the Buddhist nations of the present day, such as Thibet, China, Siam. But a closer examination of the history of the rise of Buddhism shows us that it was not so.* Where, as in the case of the countries above mentioned, caste did not exist, Buddhism certainly did not import or create it. Where, as in the case of Ceylon, it did exist, the continued influence of Buddhism has modified it. There the caste of the Brahmins, deprived of their religious functions, and supplanted by

* See *Introduction à l'Histoire du Buddhisme Indien*, par M. Burnouf. "Quant à la distinction des castes, elle était aux yeux de Câkya-muni un accident de l'existence de l'homme ici-bas, accident qu'il reconnaissait, mais qui ne pouvait l'arrêter.—(p. 210.) Câkya ouvrait donc indistinctement à toutes les castes la voie du salut, que la naissance fermait auparavant au plus grand nombre; et il les rendait égales entre elles et devant lui, en leur conférant l'investiture avec le rang de Religieux.—(p. 211.) Voilà comment Câkya-muni attaquait dans sa base le système indien, et pourquoi il devint arriver un moment où les Brahmanes, placés à la tête de ce système, sentiraient le besoin de proscrire une doctrine dont les conséquences ne pouvaient leur échapper — (p. 212.) Les observations précédentes expliquent suffisamment le fait remarquable de la co-existence des castes indiennes et du Buddhisme sur le sol de Ceylon.—(p. 214.)

"the clergy of reason," in their religious influence, have sunk to a position of inferiority beneath their military rivals. The Bauddhas (or Buddhists properly so-called) have been, with but few exceptions, exterminated from the Indian mainland; but the Jainas, who equally owe their origin to the same great religious revolution, who are Hindus by race, and dwell in the midst of Hindus, still conserve caste, so that a Jaina who becomes a convert to what the Brahmins call orthodoxy becomes at the same time a member of one of the Hindu castes, to which it is supposed that he has never ceased to belong. The position of the early Buddhists in Hindostan seems to have been similar. They followed "the good law," but still observed those punctilios belonging to their own particular caste, looking on it as a thing concerning this life alone, as something apart from religious merit or dignity. Now, if, as was the case in Ceylon, Buddhism had become universal in India, and had remained so a sufficient length of time, Brahminhood would have become a form without substance, and the

caste would have gradually disappeared. As the Buddhist priesthood is composed of approved volunteers from all classes in the community, and bound by a vow of celibacy, no new *hereditary caste* would have arisen from the establishment of the new religion. The Brahmins saw themselves called upon to surrender everything, and to receive no compensating advantages; and naturally threw the whole weight of their influence against the spread of this spiritual levelling, so gladly received and forwarded by kings and people.

It does not fall within the scope of this essay to examine the peculiar weakness of the religion taught by Sakya-muni, or rather by his disciples. After hovering over Indian history for about a thousand years as a religion at last established and popular, it was destroyed by the persecutions raised against it by the Brahmins, who had succeeded in recovering their ancient influence. But though Buddhism as a definitely separate religion has disappeared from India, it did not give way without having first pervaded with much of its

spirit the rival system. The old Brahminism of the Vedic ages before Buddha, differed widely from the new Brahminism of the Puranic ages that supplanted Buddhism. The later Brahminism resembles in many points the religion which it has expelled from the Indian mainland. It has substituted the worship of an incarnate deity for that of a deified man. Sacrifices and sacred rites there are, but they are not those enjoined by the Veda, and there still remains the "more excellent way" of Patanjali, the "discipline" of the Yogi philosophy. Faith in a personal god, devotion to his services, sometimes shown by the life-long fulfilment of an ascetic vow, sometimes by particular actions, is a road to supreme felicity, and yet open to all.* In the direction of families and individuals, these monastic orders, Gosains, Byrajis, &c., have to a great extent supplanted

* Speaking of the Byrajis, an order of religious mendicants, Sleeman observes that "they are from all castes and classes of society. The lowest Hindu may become a Byraji, and the very highest are often tempted to become so; the service of the god to which they devote themselves levelling all distinctions."—*Rambles and Recollections*, vol. ii. p. 12.

the Brahmins.* The influence of these latter depends in a great measure on their *literary* superiority (if we may so call it), arising from their having the custody of the holy *Veda*, which all sects unite in reverencing theoretically, while they neglect and contradict it in practice.

We ought furthermore, in judging of the religious nature of caste, to bear in mind that, in the estimation of the Hindus, the importance of this present life is incomparably less than that which we attach to it. We look on it as a training-school for the world to come, a contest wherein we strive for a reward that fadeth not away. They, far otherwise, deem of it as merely one out of many phases of existence, through which they pass unceasingly and eternally. This heart-wearying theory includes, under the operation of the same law, all that have proceeded from the Supreme Being—gods, men, brutes, plants. "All transmigrations recorded in sacred books, from the state of Brahma to that of plants, happen continually in this tremendous world of beings—

* Elphinstone's *History of India*, book ii. chap. ii. p. 54.

a world always tending to decay."* The wheel of fortune is ever turning. Death itself does not limit her changes. As shepherds have risen to thrones, as kings have sunk to obscurity and poverty, so the Chandala and the Brahmin may at their next births be transferred, the one for his virtues, the other for his vices, each to the other's caste. Nor is this belief in metempsychosis in India a mere speculative opinion of the schools, as it was in Greece. It is to the peasantry of these countries what a belief in the last judgment is to the peasantry of Europe. Two anecdotes † may here be cited as illustrative of the hold such doctrines have upon them. They are furthermore to our purpose as showing how caste, even the highest, is regarded as a mere accident of this present life, and that in essence all men—nay, more, all existences—are equal.

A banker named Dhoolee Sookul, a Brahmin of the Sehora *sreni* or sub-caste, died. Preparations

* Menu, i. 50.

† *Rambles and Recollections of an Indian Official*, by Sir W. H. Sleeman, vol. i. chap. iv.

were made for his obsequies, when a woman in the village belonging to the Lodhee sub-caste of Sudras, the wife of a cultivator, claimed to be burnt as a *suttee* on his funeral pile. It was in vain that her family besought her not to sacrifice herself thus gratuitously, for the self-immolation of widows is unknown among the lower classes. It was equally in vain that the Brahmin's family urged that she, a woman of so much lower caste, could not be a connection or relation of the deceased. So circumstantially did she relate the particulars of their former life together, before her last birth into this perishable world, the city in which they lived, and the very peccadillo for which she had been condemned to her present comparatively mean estate, that all scruples and doubts were overruled, the justice of her claim was allowed, and she was burnt accordingly.

The second instance is to European ideas even still more extraordinary. As a Brahmin was burning on his funeral pile together with his three wives, two serpents came out of the jungle one after the other, mounted the pyre, and were

consumed in the flames. All around admired the prodigy, which, according to their unanimous opinion, proved that these serpents must, in some previous stage of existence, have been of the number of his wives. The funeral prayers and sacrifices were therefore performed for six instead of four, and the Brahmin's descendant, who related the story to General Sleeman, always remembered the two serpents among his ancestors, when he performed the *surach* or commemorative rites in honour of the departed.

It was, however, maintained by the late Dr. Duff, that caste is a religious institution, because it is defined and regulated by "the Shaster, the Divine νόμος."* He might on similar ground have maintained, that the geographical theory, which represents this earth as made up of seven concentric islands, is also a matter of religious belief. But, in fact, if a Christian convert knows anything at all about the religion into which he has been initiated, he knows this, that its teachers

* *The Indian Rebellion, its Causes and Results*, by Dr. Alexander Duff.

not only do not deem the Shasters divine, but actually assert that they are false. When a man has once acquiesced in this position, and renounced implicitly, if not explicitly, the authority of those books, he can look on no duty therein set down as matter of religious obligation. But to the great mass of the people, to those classes from which the converts are drawn, whose caste-feeling is so much complained of by the missionaries, these Shasters are unknown. For them, caste rests upon the authority of immemorial tradition, and not upon that of abstruse treatises written in an obsolete and unknown language. In short, as a Christian convert who has sincerely renounced heathenism, cannot believe in the septinsular system of the Puranas, except from want of better geographical instruction; so his adherence to caste-rule can proceed from no motive more religious than social pride or force of habit. It is observable that it is among the lower castes that this trouble arises. Among the few Brahmins that have been converted in Bengal, there has been little trouble about their caste,

though much from the opposition of relations. Perhaps because they had a clearer appreciation of the doctrines and duties both of the religion they were deserting, and of that which they were about to embrace. They saw that Christianity, like Buddhism, had no need to summon them definitively to give up caste, for it had already abrogated all the special advantages which the institution had conferred upon them.

One great argument of the missionaries in favour of their position, that caste should not be tolerated anywhere, or among any people, is that it is not kept up among the converts in the north, that is, in Bengal and Hindostan. The force of this argument may be best estimated by a parallel instance. In the churches of aristocratic Poland, the different degrees and ranks of life worship side by side. In democratic America so strongly marked is the line of demarcation that divides the whites and the coloured people, that the two classes, for the most part, do not worship even within the same building. What force would the transatlantic republicans admit to belong to an argument

against their own practice drawn from that of Poland? Yet it might be urged that such exaggeration of social exclusiveness would be more suitable to the latter country, than to one like the American Union, the whole theory of whose constitution is based upon the principle that *all men are equal.* In a similar manner argue the missionaries. The people in Bengal have a greater number of the higher castes among them, than have the people in the Carnatic. Furthermore, those who give all this trouble are the wretched servile Sudras, who have neither high race nor gentle lineage to boast of.* In spite of a certain superficial plausibility in both these lines of reasoning, the comparatively greater strength of caste prejudices in America, admits, no doubt, of easy explanation; and we think that the origin of the differences observed between the churches in Northern and Southern India can be as easily accounted for.

The first point to be observed is, that in the

* *Life of Bishop Wilson*, by the Rev. Josiah Bateman, vol. i. p. 429.

south, where caste has been tolerated, the converts are much more numerous than elsewhere. In 1853, a missionary* estimated that the Madras Presidency contained seventy-six per cent. of the native Christians of all India. It is true that from that percentage we must subtract fifty-two, so as to exclude the peculiar case of the Shanars of Tinnevelly. However, even then we have the noteworthy fact that the native Christians in the remaining portions of the Madras Presidency are equal in numbers to those throughout all the rest of India. There are in the neighbourhood of Tanjore—the peculiar field of the labours of the sainted and judicious Schwartz—many instances of whole villages inhabited by Christians; a state of things, which has, I believe, but few parallels in Bengal, and perhaps not a single one in Hindostan. Hence, the social condition, the social necessities of the converts, are not the same in the two cases. It must also be

* Rev. J. Mullens, in his *Missions in the South of India*, pp. 177, 178; also his *Revised Statistics of Missions in India and Ceylon*, reprinted from the *Calcutta Christian Observer of* November, 1852.

remembered that in many points the habits of the lower castes are naturally and reasonably offensive to the Sudras; nor are these habits necessarily laid aside upon conversion to Christianity any more than the occupations which in great part give rise to them.* Although the Sudras may be told with a sneer that they themselves belong to a low and degraded caste, yet they are at any rate "respectable people;" and we know what would be the feelings of our English yeomanry and peasantry who so call themselves, and that not without reason, if required to consider themselves of the same caste with the gipsies, who, like the Pariahs of Tanjore, have the reputation of feeding upon carrion.

But it is not only in point of numbers and compactness that the position of the Madras converts differs from that of the converts in northern India. Two other points suggest themselves even to one who but superficially examines the question. In the south the dominant caste is

* See the letter of the Rev. Christian David to Bishop Heber, in the life of the latter by his widow, vol. ii. p. 223.

so by virtue of a more recent conquest, nor has its ascendancy been weakened by so long an endurance of foreign oppression. The histories of all conquests show that the lapse of time tends to destroy the inequality which they establish between the conquerors and the conquered. In the case of England, we see the inequality between the victors and the vanquished at Hastings completely effaced before the close of eight centuries. A like effect is produced with greater rapidity by a second conquest, involving lords and serfs in a common misfortune. The Moorish conquest of Spain destroyed for ever the distinction between the Goths and the Romans, between the barbarians who had effected a previous conquest and the provincials who had been subjected to one. That the Mohammedan *raj* has had the effect of enfeebling caste-feeling, we have already noticed when speaking of the Nairs of Malabar. Nor is the Mohammedan the only anti-Hindu influence which presses with greater force on the North than on the South. Calcutta, the principal seat of our Government, is naturally a centre for the

diffusion of European ideas; and the influence of its Europeanized Baboos has lessened in the Bengali the natural tenacity with which all men cling more or less to ancestral customs and prejudices. These several points of difference taken together constitute a fair ground of exception against the parallel which has been drawn between the native Christians of Tanjore and Bengal.

There is yet another argument brought forward by the missionaries in favour of the total abrogation of caste. Its retention,* say they, facilitates a return to heathenism. But surely in expressing regret at such being the case, they can hardly have considered the alternative. They cannot wish that a man who has once embraced Christianity should be placed in a position from which he could not retire, or at any rate not without great difficulty. They would not have his original conversion otherwise than voluntary. Why then should his continuance in the faith be

* *Life of Bishop Wilson*, by Rev. Josiah Bateman, vol. i. p. 436.

of a more doubtful character? In the early days of the Church it was far otherwise. When the disciple of Christ was dragged before the judgment-seat of the prætor, a handful of frankincense cast upon the fire in the name of the gods of Rome would suffice to deliver him from the lions or the cross. It was this freedom even to the end that produced those martyrs whose blood was the seed of the Church.

Certain advantages belonging to this complete freedom are apparent in the recent history of Christianity in India. The first intimation that Bishop Wilson received of the unsatisfactory condition of the southern churches was from the report of the number of apostacies that had taken place during the year 1832.* If the bridge, over which such deserters retreated had been broken down, the disease would have been as malignant, but the symptoms might not have been as apparent as they were. From the accounts given of the churches in Tanjore, it is evident that they had

* *Life of Bishop Wilson*, by Rev. Josiah Bateman, *loc. cit.*

from some cause or other become filled with nominal Christians, with men who had embraced the new religion from other motives than conviction. The churches were in need of purification, of a wholesome persecution; and this lukewarmness displayed itself in the matter of caste. The fault to be found with the native Christians in the Madras diocese is, that their attachment to their religion was so lukewarm that they preferred earth to heaven, *caste to Christianity,** social advantages to spiritual, respectability in this life to salvation in the next.

In the preceding chapter we have shown how caste rules have been relaxed whenever they came into collision with any strong feeling, necessity, or even convenience. Without requiring of those native Christians the total abrogation of caste, it was not too much to insist that its rules should be modified wherever they interfered with the most solemn rites of Chris-

* Such is said to be the express declaration of a Tanjore Christian to Dr. Rhenius.—*Life of Bishop Wilson*, by Rev. Josiah Bateman, *loc. cit.*

tianity, or ran counter to its plainest duties. If to buy bread baked by one of an inferior class or sugar sold by him does not forfeit caste, neither need the communicating from the same cup with him in the Lord's Supper do so. This distinction however between things secular and things sacred, between that which was indifferent and what was of vital importance, does not appear to have been clearly put before them. The missionaries saw (what indeed was plain enough) that caste feeling often manifested itself in most unchristian shapes, and that at the best it embarrassed them. For all this they could fix on but one remedy, that of extirpating it altogether, without perhaps giving due weight to the fact that it had been rooted in the ideas and all the institutions of the people for centuries before the arrival of the first missionaries, Ziegenbalg and Gründler. It seemed to them at once easier and more effectual to raze to the very foundation the temple which had once contained idols than to cleanse and adapt it for a house of Christian prayer, more especially when they

were not so confident in their acquaintance with the nature of the previous idol-worship, as to be sure about the heathenish character of certain integral portions of the temple.

Yet a somewhat similar distinction between the relation of caste to things spiritual and things secular had been observed by the missionaries to prevail among the unconverted natives. Throughout the southern Mahratta country is extensively spread a flourishing sect of Hindus called Lingaits. They belong chiefly to the trading and manufacturing classes of the community, who are by far the most intelligent and independent of the people, and have learned in some measure to think and act for themselves. They have given up their reverence for the popular idolatry, believe in the unity of God, and that all men are but of one caste. Consequently *in their own assemblies* they eat together, although *in public* they belong to castes, between whom such social intercourse is forbidden.*

* *Missions in South India*, by the Rev. Josiah Mullens, p. 42.

We may compare with these the case of the Sikhs in the north-west. Originally founded on the doctrine, that there is but one caste, their devotion to their faith has since cooled down; till they have come to regard caste so tenderly that a Gurumata or general council has not been held for years, in order that men descended from different castes may not be obliged to eat the consecrated cakes together.* This proves not that caste is an idle institution, but that men will not act contrary to their usual habits unless the religious feelings which call on them so to do, be sufficiently real. An individual instance of this is furnished by Mr. Mullens, a missionary of the London society, from whom we have extracted the notice of the Lingait sect. He tells us of a candidate for ordination who contrived to avoid dining with Bishop Spencer, although for consistency's sake he could not openly decline the invitation, inasmuch as he had previously stated that caste was only a civil distinction. It is a pity that the bishop did not press the

* Shore's *Notes on Indian Affairs*, vol. ii. p. 486.

matter to an issue before ordaining him.* If a candidate for investiture with the yellow robe of "the clergy of reason," had so trifled with the president of a Buddhist *vihara*, we can have but little doubt but that in the days when Buddhism retained vitality he would have been at once rejected as one whose thoughts were fixed rather on "this perishable world," than on the hope of "final liberation." If the native Christians had after all explanations declared that they could not recognize any distinctions such as, that communicating from the same cup did not impair their social rank; and that on the ground that their heathen relations and caste-fellows would not do so, then their conduct would indeed fall within the scope of the text, "*He that loveth father and mother more than me is not worthy of me.*"

Doubtless caste belongs rather to a heathen than to a Christian community; doubtless it often furnishes occasions for the display of unchristian and unbrotherly feelings. Such feelings however,

* Mullens's *Missions in South India*, p. 88.

and such display of them, are unhappily not confined to India, but may be paralleled in countries which have been for centuries professedly Christian. Bishop Heber suggested as a parallel to the caste-feeling in Tanjore those prejudices against coloured people in the free states of America, excluding them *without distinction of wealth, education or respectability* from all communion with the whites, even from a share in the same places of worship. I do not know that any one has impugned in any important point the justness of this parallel. It gave great and reasonable scandal when a Sudra corpse was interred irregularly by the relations rather than that the funeral service should be read over it by a Pariah catechist. Yet social slights of much less importance have in England been resented in ways at least equally unbecoming and unchristian.

We have been hitherto arguing on the hypothesis that the bridge (to employ again the metaphor of Bishop Wilson's biographer) between the converts and heathenism would have been broken down by the breach of caste rules. But it does not appear

that the temptations to relapse would have been materially affected by such a course. The report presented to the Metropolitan of India in 1832 certified that in the course of that one year alone one hundred and sixty eight natives had apostatized. Now when we consider the ease and frequency with which old castes are broken up and new ones continually formed, it is plain that two courses would be open to apostate Christians who had broken caste. If their unconverted friends were sufficiently influential, a few ceremonies and a sum of money distributed among their former caste-fellows would procure for them a re-entry into all their original privileges. Otherwise they would form a caste of their own, and their numbers and previous respectability would probably give them a far from insignificant or uncomfortable position.

It does not fall within the scope of this essay to examine the circumstances that have contributed to retard the conversion of India to Christianity. All that does come within my present design, is to show that "caste" as com-

monly understood does not materially increase the forces of the powers of darkness, which resist the efforts of so many noble and zealous spirits to pour the light of the glorious gospel of liberty on them that sit in the shadow of death. A subsidiary proof of this fact seems to me to be furnished by complaints of like slowness of conversion being repeated with respect to other countries ignorant of caste. China at once suggests itself as an instance. Yet Buddhism, the popular religion of China, especially in its present corrupt and degenerate state, would seem to be far less capable of resisting a higher faith than the pliable varied systems of Hinduism. Christianity, as the only religion universally true without distinction of age, rank, education, race, climate, has been compared to that manna in the wilderness of which the Talmudists say, that to every man it tasted like what he liked best. Hinduism has, as it were, attempted a caricature of this universal adaptability, and, unable to charm all while remaining the same, Proteus-like for ever changes its form and seeming. Subtle and refined for the intellec-

tual, wonderful and sublime for the imaginative, licentious for the depraved, ascetic for the severe, formal for the indolent, and liberal for the sceptic, this religion becomes all things to all men that it may by all means retain some.

Popular modern caste is too lightly lost and regained to be balanced against eternal life by minds sincerely convinced of the truth. Nor is it among the lower orders alone that we meet with such trifling with what early writers on Hinduism represented as worse than death.* We have given above instances of re-entry into the highest castes being purchased at a price. But though the spurious, derived, technical caste cannot be considered as an obstacle in the way of the conversion of India, the real, original, national caste must be considered not only as an obstacle, but as a most formidable one,—one which it behoves us well to consider how best we may surmount it. The trifling punctilios which serve

* Burke's works, vol. vii. p. 45. (*Bohn's British Classics.*) Speech on the impeachment of Warren Hastings. Third Day. Compare Shore's *Notes on India Affairs.* No. lxi., esp. pp. 479, 493.

to distinguish those who are in society from those who are not, the petty jealousies which sever men of different occupations, the more serious prejudices and mutual antipathies which pervade the relations of many tribes to each other, may be paralleled elsewhere, although in India they assume a form altogether Indian. But the true and original caste-distinction, of which all others are but shadows and imitations, the distinction between the "twice-born" and the "once-born," between the civilizers and the civilized, is of very different importance. It is a fact that in India there is a nation* who are urged to oppose the spread of Christianity by every consideration of spiritual conceit, aristocratic pride, and material interests, a threefold cord, of which a missionary might well consider the Brahminical *janeo* an emblem. The subject of continually recurring complaints in all accounts of missionary labours is the hostile influence of the Brahmins. It is no bugbear, and

* "In modern times the Brahmins form a nation," says Professor Wilson, in a note to Mill's *History of India*, vol. i. p. 133.

why indeed should it be? These Brahmins are the representatives of that race which civilized so much of India by conquest, when as yet it was in the sole possession of the Shanars and Santals. To that conquest they came endowed with that varied genius, and provided with that admirable language which distinguish the Aryan race in all parts of the earth whither they have spread, whether in Aryaverta or in Hellas, on the banks of the Tiber or of the Rhine, or in the furthermost isles of the ocean. In the midst of the aborigines, the savage and rude *Mlechchas*, they felt much as Englishmen feel among the wild tribes of Africa. They conquered and partially civilized them; but they kept the key of knowledge in their own hands, because their subjects were too indolent to wrest it from them.

Of those aborigines many tribes never became subjected to their influence, either from the inaccessible nature of their fastnesses, as was the case of the Khonds, or from their remote situation, as in the case of the Shanars. The former of these two tribes still offer human sacrifices; the

latter are worshippers of devils, whom they seek to propitiate with dances and incantations. Those who disbelieve the divine mission of Christianity, and look on its influence in India as beneficial only because it is the religion of the civilizing race, say that to try and elevate these lower tribes is *the* appropriate work for Christian missions in that part of the earth; nor are missionaries wanting who advocate the same course of action, though from an entirely different view of the origin of Christianity. They dwell, with an especial—may I not say a too exclusive?—partiality, on the text that "the poor have the Gospel preached to them."

Now what do we find to be in fact the history of Christianity. St. Paul says that in Christ there is neither Greek nor Jew, Barbarian nor Scythian; but we find him and the other apostles preaching to the Jews and Greeks rather than to the Scythians. There were missions, doubtless, planted among the Barbarians; and an apologist boasts that Christians were to be found among

tribes that had never heard of the name of Rome. But the main stem of Christianity, if I may be allowed such an expression, was planted on the shores of the Mediterranean, amid the civilization of the Roman empire. Its intellect and culture were converted and pressed into her service. From that time forward the highest civilization has gone on hand in hand with the true faith. It was this alliance which led to the rapid conversion of the northern nations; and hence to modern European Christianity. We should be prepared to imitate the first missionaries and founders of our religion; and, while we admit that before God all souls are of equal value, we should especially exert ourselves to gain over those intellects, whose recognized superiority among their fellows would render their conversion so powerful to the persuasion of others. Thus would be silenced that old Jewish taunt, so often repeated in India, "Have any of the chief priests or rulers believed on Him?"

Nor are there wanting signs of the approach

of so desirable a consummation. Already in Bengal has the presence of the Gospel produced the same effect as in the days of the Antonines. A sect has sprung up, that of the New Vedantists, who, like the New Platonists of Alexandria, profess to find all, which in Christianity commends itself to them as divine, already set forth in their own sacred books. From these they carefully select such passages as they think make for them, and then set forth their selection as containing the pure and unaltered orthodox Hinduism.*

As the peepul-tree, the tree of the gods, when it has once struck its root into any building, whether temple or mosque, ceases not to extend them on all sides till the building crumbles to pieces beneath its imperceptible, secret, but continual advance; so shall the slight graft from the great stock of Christianity planted in India still continue to strike root downward and to bear

* For a notice of the New Vedantists and their great patron, the Maharajah of Burdwan, see *Memoir of the Rev. J. J. Weitbrecht*, by his widow, p. 601. Appendix 4.

fruit upward, driving apart the inorganic masses of an obsolete heathenism, while drawing sustenance from all which in it had been true and had served for so long a time to cement the great idol-temple. As a missionary at Benares was standing upon one of the *ghats* leading down to the Ganges, and looking up at an overhanging Hindu temple which threatened soon to come down from its commanding position, a Brahmin, who was returning from purifying himself in the sacred waters, approached him. "I know," said he, "that you are now thinking to yourself that, as yon temple must fall no long time hence, so will the religion of Brahma fall before that which you preach." "And what do you think of it?" inquired the missionary. "That it will soon be so," was the reply. When that blessed day has come, the institutions of India will be still Indian although Christian. To say how they will be modified demands a more intimate knowledge of the Indian mind, than any European can be supposed to possess.

This however we may venture to predict—that, when the Indo-Aryan Brahmins are received into the one fold under one Shepherd, Christianity will have accomplished a conquest nobler and more important than any since the complete conversion of the Teutonic barbarians. When we consider the wonderful zeal and success with which that Indo-Aryan race proselytized the vast empires adjacent to India, from Thibet to Ceylon, having nothing as yet to proclaim to them, save "the good law" of Sakya-muni, what will they not effect when they shall have to offer to them "the everlasting gospel," of Him to whom alone of right belong the Buddhistic titles of "the Vanquisher" and "the Comforter of the World?"

Then will it be found that the Christianized Hindoos shall have practically solved the question of the compatibility or incompatibility of caste and Christianity—a question, of which we Europeans, severed as even the nearest of us are by the vast gulf fixed between the English and

the Indian minds, can only pretend to investigate and display some of the more prominent complexities. May God grant to all, who are called to have practically to deal with it, faith, charity, patience and self-distrust.

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